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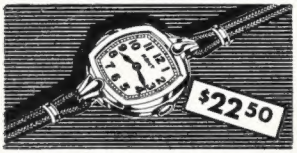

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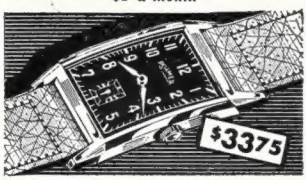

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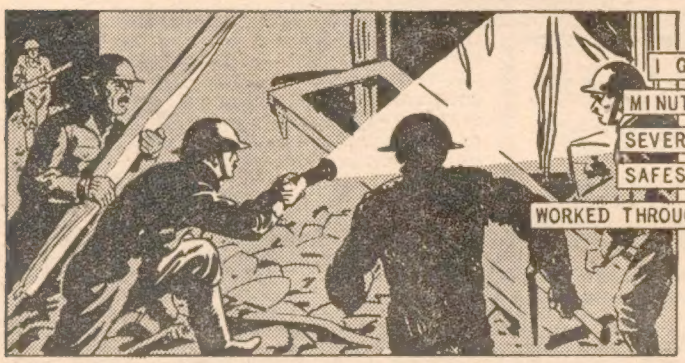

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Adventure

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Vol. 109, No.4 for August, 1943 Best of New Stories

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"Everything reduces itself to money—even patriotism," Chid Alwyn argued when Captain Perry came to Noank recruiting shipwrights to build his battle fleet in the Erie wilderness. It cost him plenty to learn that there's more to Americanism than flag-waving and that the profits of patriotism can't always be reckoned in dollars and cents.

Shot for Shot . . . . . RAY MILLHOLLAND 37
In which a couple of Leathernecks—with a Jap sniper for a target—conclude the match they'd started on the base-camp range.

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Where convoys sail with closely guarded speed we find the rusty tramps.

The Forge of Olvir Bigmouth (a novelette) . . De WITT NEWBURY 50
Even as today, when the Viking long-boats cleaved the waves from the Skagerrak to Iceland it was better to die like a man than to live like a thrall.

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Cover painted for Adventure by Maurice Bower *Kenneth S. White, Editor*

Published once a month by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City 17. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 2, 1935, at the Post Office at Chicago, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879. Yearly subscription $2.50 in advance. Single copy, 25 cents. Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Subscription Dept., 205 East 42nd St., New York, N. Y. Trade Mark registered. Copyright, 1943, by Popular Publications, Inc. All rights reserved under Pan-American Copyright Convention. Printed in U. S. A.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

DESPITE the extra room this month in our new expanded format the quarters are crowded. We wish we could have added still another guest wing or at least a lean-to to shelter unexpected company. As host we're going to fold ourselves away in a corner and not even try to slip words in edgewise while the Writers' Brigade does its own fueling of the fire in the limited space available.

With appropriately salty tang Carl D. Lane writes—

To this nautical author *The Camp-Fire* has always seemed *The Galley-Fire*, that pleasant place on shipboard where the offwatch gathers for a gam and a mug-up. This is the third time that I have been privileged to contribute to the yarning that goes on there, just as it does about the downwood fire in the deep woods.

I am going to be perfectly frank about the beginnings of "The Fleet in the Forest." It started as a short story, having for its theme the internal problems faced by America as it prepared for every war it ever fought, particularly the re-adjustment of the non-combatant to a war economy. A short story should run about 18 pages. Mine hit 31. An interested editor wanted it cut—and cutting always breaks an author's heart. You lose all the nice little bits that you sweated over. So I simply expanded this short story from 31 pages to about 400 and thus had a novel!

It wasn't quite as simple as that, of course. The skeleton had to be fact. I could find no more romantic episode as a stage for my characters than the preparation for the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813. Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, Noah Brown, the great shipbuilder, many of Perry's officers—these are real characters and a study of old records, official naval reports and many a dusty volume showed what they had done and said *before* the famous engagement. Research of this kind, then peopling the uncovered facts with fictional characters in part is the grandest and most satisfying sort of yarning for me. It creates the illusion of reality for the author himself.

"Dry" as lots of these records are, between the faded old-fashioned printing is many a human and dramatic story. Some of Chid's adventures are real and the experiences of unnamed men of forgotten records. His privateering experiences are those of one Amos Fast, one of the 95 out of 100 who did *not* make any prize money.

I could not piece this story together without being impressed by its similarity to our own experiences in preparing for the present war. Nor could I forget as the writing progressed that possibly the story of Chid Alwyn and how he solved his problems of loyalty and sacrifice would perhaps contribute to the present day spirit of "all out war" which we at home must achieve.

Then, like now, naval ships and shipbuilding were the keynotes of victory. Noah Brown, as he contemplated his herculean task in the wilderness, was in the same position as a Liberty Ship builder who had neither material nor tools—but he did the job.

There is little new about myself. A few books and a few short stories have emerged from the scuppers of my desk. The ketch is sleeping in a blacked-out seaport village, waiting for the day of victory—a little too old, as is her skipper, to serve in the Navy. I have no gas, no meat, no potatoes, no shoes—but I've still got my battered old typewriter without the small T and hope soon o wri e ano her s ory for *Adven ure.*

Adven ure hopes along the same lines, oo.

(Continued on page 155)

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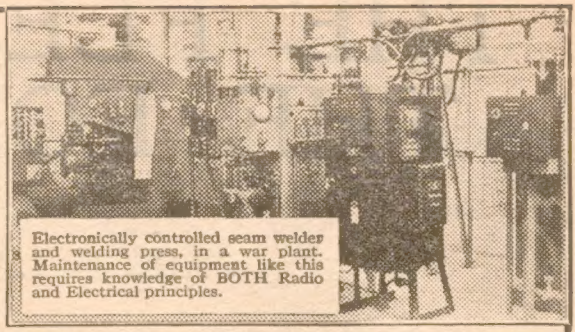

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THE FLEET IN THE FOREST

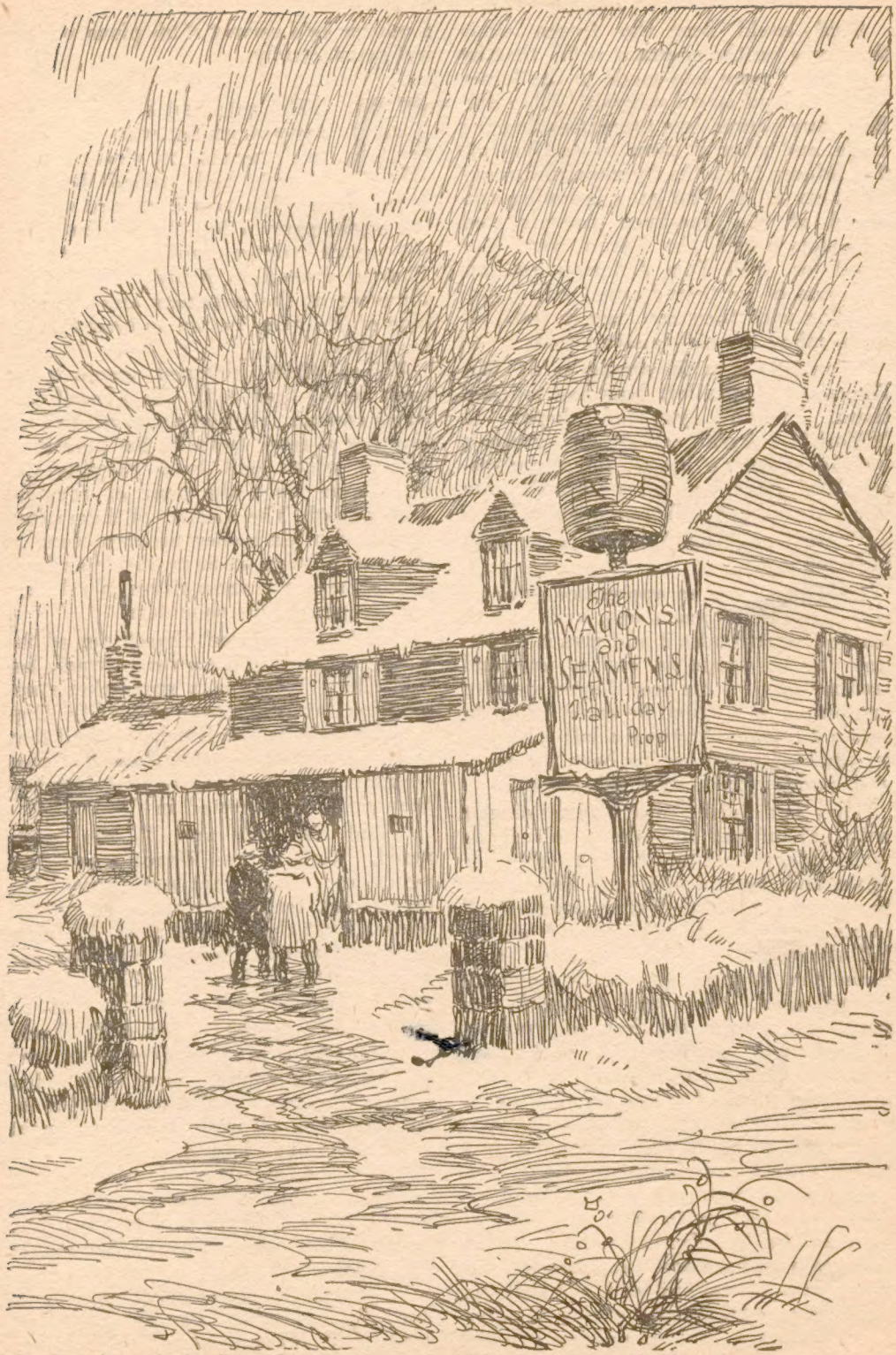
BY

CARL D. LANE

Noble ship and noble man—each straight of keel and true of build, each tried in storm and tide and peril lest they perish on the voyage. For each the goal is freedom; for the ship to live and sail and laugh, for the man to dream and build and love, both proud and true and worthy—both the handiwork of God.

CHID ALWYN stood with the rest of the shipyard hands on the bleak seaward slope of Baptist Hill when Old Man Tatum was buried that blizzarding day in January, 1813. Off in the snow curtain he could barely make out the spars of the *Blessed Cause,* moored in the salt river below, between a dolphin and the Tatum east-wharf. The sight filled him with a queer excitement, thinking what the privateer was to mean to him and his dreams, but he kept his eyes reasonably attentive on Reverend Thurber's soaked prayer book. The reverend read slowly and dolorously, as if he enjoyed it, and in the pauses blew noisily on his fingers to warm them.

Mr. Halliday's Wagon's and Seamen's stood with inviting nearness to



the junction of the Post Road and to the fishing wharves of Noank.

Chid could hear the frozen clods thumping on the chestnut coffin that he and Bob Crown had made in the joiner loft of the old man's shipyard. Chid and Bob were apprentices there, learning the trade, and when it came to making coffins, Moses Leet, the foreman, naturally set them at it. The gang, grinning and proud of the fine-lined packets and schooners which the Tatum yard had stood for until Tom Jefferson and his Congress of southerners had killed ship building with their embargo in 1807, always called the coffins steamboats.

"You lads is in the wrong yard," Mr. Diggers, the spar loft boss had mocked them. "Whyn't you go daown to N'York? I hyear tell Mister Fulton's buildin' another o' his fire and steam vessels. An', boys, you tell me what's more like a steamboat hull than a coffin."

"Your head!" Chid tossed back, driving trunnels.

Chid had been an apprentice since he was fifteen, five years ago, and he had learned how to take it and give it. Now, knowing his trade as well as any and waiting only for his bound-agreement to run out come August, he could afford to sass a foreman. Anyway a loft foreman, sparmaking never having been the exact and cunning trade of a shipwright.

They had finished the coffin, lining it with oakum and soft shiny bolt goods which Mary Leet had brought from her Ma's, and made a few jokes about how handsome Old Man Tatum would look in his steamboat; then trundled it up the hill above the horse-ferry to the Tatum house that overlooked all New England, seemed as if. Now, his handiwork was gone, sunk into six feet of gravelly thawed earth, and the waste of it somehow made Chid a little mad. Two days and a fair deal of prime hand-whipped chestnut board and enough oakum to caulk the garboard of a Noanker; just to keep the worms from the carcass of a grouchy old man a few extra months. There was nothing to show for his work. It was like his apprenticeship—almost five years of hard work and knocks, and now, with a war on and shipbuilding dead as a gutted cod, nothing to show for it either. Chid sometimes guessed that he had taken up the wrong trade, a matter he'd correct if his plans worked out satisfactorily.

THE gale had started in the early morning, with rain, and had turned to sleet as the church bells tolled for Old Man Tatum. But now it whined around the burial party a full-blown blizzard in the quick winter twilight. Reverend Thurber droned on, piously blind to the shivering of the mourners and the sobbing of Old Mrs. Tatum and her attending ladies.

Folks, Chid reckoned comfortably, must be all-fired cold. He himself was warm enough. He had contrived to kick together a small heap of the pine knot embers which had been thawing the earth ever since the hour of the Old Man's death. The warmth of them sifted up through his homespun greatcoat. It felt queer, being so warm inside and yet seeing the heavy snow flakes pile deeper and deeper on his shoulders.

Nez Nott conjured himself out of the storm, appearing like a swale wraith beside Chid. Nez was a sparmaker's apprentice, lately discharged by Mr. Diggers for rumming and such. He had that morning signed on the *Blessed Cause* schooner as carpenter rate, and since had been mighty interested in Chid.

"Noah Brown's arruv," Nez whispered. "He's at the Wagon's and Seamen's, and, Chid, what you s'pose? The man won't tech rum; not even on the house. Ain't that suthin' now? 'I'll take,' sez he, 'a spot o' Madeira, landlord; jest a spot fer the chills o' me.' Chid, beware you do business with a man like that."

"I'm not a'feared," Chid said. "Reckon a man can do as he likes about rum and still have some business sense. Nez, you better spook. We oughtn't to be seen together till my papers are bought back and I'm free to ship."

"Why be so damned legal?" Nez growled. "Chid, a week with Cap Fish on the *Blessed Cause*, an' you can buy Noah Brown's own shipyard, the money you'll have."

" 'Twould do me no good in the jailhouse," Chid said. "I've till August to serve, Old Man Tatum dead or alive. Nez, you lam, I got some profitin' to do

right here before I can even commence thinking about shipping."

Nez spit into the wind and silently dissolved into the storm.

Nez Nott was a raggie, on his own like Chid, since the thin vein of iron on Dejection Hill had run out years ago and scattered the loosely related Nott tribe. But he'd never made the mistake Chid had, signing apprenticeship papers to learn a trade, becoming practically a slave, which was what he considered Chid in the Tatum yard on the Mystic. Nez lived by his wits, never bothered by understanding how to read or write or cipher. He had the habits of an animal and could sleep wherever he happened to be when he became tired, and eat anything handy, or nothing, when he became hungry.

Chid reckoned Nez was all right and in an untroubling way envied him his freedom. Chid wanted freedom too, but not the kind Nez had. When a man knew a trade, when he could read and write and own to folks, even though dead and gone, it wasn't simply the freedom of sleeping and eating that he craved. Chid had his own ideas about the particular brand of freedom that he wanted; not too well defined, but in his ambitions it sort of had its basis in money.

Chid stood directly over the ebbing heat of the embers, misering it under his coat. He'd not had much trouble making money; no more than in keeping warm on this dismal bleak day when everybody else was cold. The trouble was that it had all been small money, pocket coins, not advancing his dreams much. There was still a tidy sum needed to get along with his plans. But C... calculated that in a few hours things would be some different.

Reverend Thurber closed his prayer book at last. He prayed then out of his head, softly, kind of reviewing Old Man Tatum's life, and the wind swirled from the north and screeched through the bare branches of the few twisted pasture oaks hard by the stone fence of the burying ground. Chid had to wait. What he was going to do, he sensed, couldn't be mixed with such a solemn moment. But he drew forth his prepared paper and nodded to Mr. Driddle, the grave digger, in an understanding way; then stole silently down the hill and took up a post at the burying ground gate.

In the rutted lane beyond, several livery carriages awaited. The horses were blanket-covered, and they breathed steam in impatient blubbering blasts. From behind the frost scratches on the glass peered the drivers, gathered round a circulating bottle, wondering how mortals could exist on such a bitter wind-swept hill, a-listening to a goll-darned preacher preach.

CHID was ready for folks when at last they came slowly down the hill. Mr. Driddle had instructed him, being experienced in graveyard conduct. Chid showed the paper, passing it through the family groups as they walked slowly to the carriages. He didn't have to say much for folks to understand.

"Yes'm," Chid said, making his words slowly, "for him we all loved. Thank you, Ma'm . . . Mr. Driddle'll call on you in time. Thank you very kindly."

He had no trouble at all with folks who hadn't worked for Old Man Tatum. Away from his shipyard Asa Tatum had been well-liked enough, a deacon in the church and one of the burgesses of the township. Almost everybody was willing to name a sum they'd be responsible for to place a handsome stone on the bare burying plot. Catching folks like that, cold and anxious to get indoors and having to decide right in front of neighbors, had been Chid's idea. Usually Mr. Driddle waited for two weeks and then made his rounds privately, and he never had raised but a small stone sum.

All Chid had to do was to mark down the sum and the name along the margin of the drawing for the proposed stone. It was astounding how it ran up. He faced the shipwrights unabashed, secure by reason of the wives being with most of them.

"A great stone for a great man," Chid told a group filing by. "Even William Dalrymple promised a sum I'll not mention right out . . . and William, you might say, wasn't on first-rate terms

with Mr. Tatum. Thank you, sir . . . I mark it five dollars for the Eldredge family; thank you indeed."

Chid did it just right. He had sense enough not to go to Mrs. Tatum or Reverend Thurber. Many told him that he was doing a fine thing, something truly for all of them. Chid could even feel a small glow of righteousness and forget for a minute the real reason behind his soliciting.

Mr. Driddle hung in the background shadows, looking anxious. The snow lay deep on his drawing and the list of names filled all four margins. It made Chid feel a little bad when Mrs. Tatum touched his sleeve and said softly, "God bless you, Chidsy. Asa always believed that you didn't like him."

"I'm right sorry, ma'm," Chid said and lowered his eyes. "I always liked him and I'm proud to do this."

She passed slowly on to the carriage which Old Beemis was holding, the last to leave Old Man Tatum in his lonely new bed. Only Mr. Driddle remained in the graveyard. He came now, like a wolf to a feast, from behind a stand of alder and clutched Chid's arm. "You done good, I reckon," he said. "Give over the paper, boy."

" 'Bout two hundred dollars, off-hand figuring," Chid said. But he pocketed the paper, buttoning his coat over it. "Mr. Driddle, less than half that would provide an all-fired handsome stone. Look, I been up to New London and I kind of ran across Nehemiah Avery, and he mentioned he wasn't so busy this time of the year."

Mr. Driddle looked scared. "Boy," he croaked, "you wouldn't do that?"

Chid laughed and shrugged. "I ain't done nothing yet," he said. "I don't mean to, you don't make me. But Avery just happened to see your drawing sticking out of my pocket, and he mentioned, being as he wasn't busy, that he'd be pleased to make such a stone for an even seventy dollars, any reasonable lettering on it, and set to Mrs. Tatum's fancy soon's the frost leaves."

Chid wasn't worried about Mr. Driddle. He had had the digging and stone trade in Portersville ever since anybody could remember, and it wasn't reasonable to suppose he'd fuss too much the first time anybody had ever checked on his charges. Chid hadn't meant to do what he was doing. The original agreement was ten dollars for the list, Chid promising that, as one of Mr. Tatum's employees, he would raise an amount that would surprise Mr. Driddle. They had estimated that a hundred dollars would be good, and Chid would get his ten out of it. Allowing for that and some of the pledges becoming uncollectable for one reason and another, Mr. Driddle had designed a good sixty-dollar stone. But now, with the subscription list almost two hundred dollars, Chid reckoned he'd been smart to see Avery.

"I only checked on your price," Chid said, not mentioning his disappointment when he had found that Mr. Driddle's figures had been fair enough. "It was all right . . . and you can still do the job for way under a hundred dollars, just like Avery."

"What happens to the extra money?"

"Well, now," Chid grinned, "I reckon that's for me to say. I collected it and I got the list."

Mr. Driddle swore, not pleasantly, but Chid paid him no heed. A man had a right, sort of, to let off after being used like that. "Dang it!" Mr. Driddle shouted. "I'll have you before a magistrate. You'll end up in the gaol, I swear."

"We both will," Chid said. "Two hundred dollars for a sixty-dollar stone's akin to stealing, I'd guess. You been making stones a long time, Mr. Driddle. It would be a shame to have it end just because of one little mess like this."

OLD Beemis' horses were straining into the hames, trying to break the wheels of the last carriage from the frozen ruts; a matter Chid watched with calculation. Just before they broke out, Chid figured to give a helping push. It was a cold bitter night, and his help might earn him a lift into the village, two miles away.

Mr. Driddle blew snow from his yellow Hessian mustache in resignation. "How much, boy?" he mumbled.

"Fifty," Chid said. "Fifty is all I need. It's cheap to you."

"All right," said Mr. Driddle. "Boy, you want to rejuce yer rates slight, we'd make a team, we would. Now, give over the list."

"Nope," said Chid. "I got to have the fifty right now. That's why it's only fifty. Was I to wait or maybe take your word for it, it would have to be double. I won't be around these parts much longer, so I'm willing to settle for that right now."

"Tarnation!" Mr. Driddle growled. "You think a man carries money like that in his breeks?"

"'Course I don't. You drop by the Wagon's and Seamen's in an hour. That's when I'll be needing the money. You'll get your list. But I wouldn't wait was I you. It ain't so far to New London, and Avery is almighty idle."

Chid heard the carriage wheels crunching on new ice, and hurried to be on hand for the break-out. But Old Beemis, on the box, looked at him with impatience and moved over. "Thought that'ud fetch you," he grunted. "This here rig ain't been stuck at all, Chidsy; it's been waitin' on you. What in snum you been chinnin' with Tom about?"

"We were picking out a nice plot for you," Chid said, clearing the snow from the offside of the double seat. "What you want, Beem?"

Old Beemis made a sucking sound understood by the horses, and they moved homeward through the blizzard. He swayed close to Chid, turning rheumy eyes on him, and handed him a flat package wrapped in a swatch of sail cloth.

"This here's fer you, Chidsy," he croaked. "It's why I waited. Nez Nott figured it wasn't right to give it to you in a graveyard, not with a preacher to windward anyways." Old Beemis lowered his voice, "Nez says to mention that the *Blessed Cause* drops to salt a'fore midnight. He'll save yer berth till two bells, no later."

"It's the third bottle of rum he's given me," Chid said, taking the packet. "They must want me bad."

"Carpenters is hard to get," the old man said. "One flask will fetch up to able. But it takes two fer gunners and marines, and three, to least, for cooks an' carpenters."

"How's that?"

"It's like this now," Beemis said, cocking his head to reason the matter out in words for Chid, "seamen stay with the ship an' share all prizes. Gunners, they get picked off by topmen and musketeers, an' marines drink theirselves to death afore land's dropped. But carpenters, boy; they get sent home with the prizes to keep 'em afloat and get swindled outen their share o' what's taken arterwards."

They crunched on in silence, paralleling the river which was already icing in the coves. The first house lights of the village appeared like candles seen behind smoky sash, and in the coach below Mrs. Tatum sobbed and made small meaningless talk with her ladies. Chid wasn't worried about shipping on the privateer nor of being swindled out of his share of the prize money. He had always had to take care of himself, and he hadn't done badly. The Embargo Act had stifled all shipping, and about every New England business depending upon it, and times had been poor. Squeezing opportunity, after the hard search for it, had in a way become a specialty of Chid's during these lean years.

His main trouble right now was the hindering apprenticeship. Binding him to the Tatum yard had been one of the last earthly deeds of his father's. He was himself a shipwright at the yard, and Chid had gone into the training joyously, thrilling to the feel of the smooth hickory-handled tools and the chuffing of the big wooden planes as they bit into sweet new pine plank. Chid guessed, then, that shipbuilding was sort of in his blood, as horse racing or seamanship or farming was said to be in some men's blood.

Chid had felt the loss of father keenly. A small brig had stuck on the Tatum launch-ways one summer tide, and his father had taken a gang under her to clear the jammed wedges. When the ship had at last commenced its belated slide to the river, men's screams had mingled with the shriek of her tortured blocking and they had brought three men out from under the cradle. Two had died, Ned Darrow and Chid's father; and Chid was left alone.

Mrs. Palmer, who was next-neighbor,

and the Leets had been kind to him, easing the pain and shock of those first dreary lonely days. For a time Chid tried living with the Leets, enjoying the tidy low-ceilinged home and the abundant table and the sport of teasing Mary, who was near his own age. On winter nights the shipwrights gathered about Moses' hoarded nip-cider before the hearth, and the stories about ships being born were spun. Chid loved those evenings. From them he took the pride which he had in his trade, and came to understand in time that he was part of a great tradition of America. The Leets', save for his father's absence, was a better home than he had ever known. Even in those days he wanted, some day, to be master of one like it.

When he was eighteen, grown in pride, Chid had understood that he was almost a man and that he couldn't stay on at the Leets. There was the question of board money for one thing, for Old Man Tatum considered the learning he was providing sufficient compensation without a wage too. When the chance came, he moved his small belongings to the apprentice dormitory, above the sail loft at Tatum's and bunked with the journeymen who came to work in the yard.

CHAPTER II

IF A MAN WERE FREE—

HE thereafter moved in a man's world, thinking and doing man things. He learned, quickly enough, how to take care of himself and fight for his place in their bunk-house society, and it felt good of an evening, with his back aching from a long day of adzing breast hooks or whipping plank, to linger in the Wagon's and Seamen's with pleasant company over flip and shipyard talk to ease the remembrance of it.

For a while Chid used to go to the Leets for his Sunday dinner, coming early so Aunt Leety could take a swing at patching his clothes and Mary could decide whether he needed to shave or not. He made it a point always to wash for Sunday and pull his clothes around as nearly as he could manage, but they always found something that needed the needle or fussing over.

Moses Leet, after dinner, always took a nap, snoring loudly on the back parlor sofa, still in his stiff church clothes, and when he'd wake up, Chid and he would plan out the next week's work at the yard. Chid enjoyed that. Thinking ahead, planning, bringing out some cute short-cut to save time or material, always gave him a feeling of promise, as if, come time and opportunity, his would be a mighty useful and profitable talent to have.

Moses, smoking one of the Philadelphia seegars of the box of fifty which Mr. Tatum gave him each New Year's Day, sometimes branded Chid's ideas as cheating.

"There ain't no short-cuts in shipbuilding, boy," he pointed out once; "not in life either, there ain't. It's a lesson you got to learn, Chid, 'pears to me."

"A job," Chid had argued back, "has got to show a profit. It's what Tatum or any man takes 'em for. So I reckon a man's got a right to twist his time and

material and work methods 'round much as he's a mind to to make a profit—so long as he turns out the job."

Chid was just turned twenty then; tall and blond as one of the Swedish fishermen who lived down Pequot way. He was quick all over—eyes, fingers, and feet—and strong as a young bullock, which he had once proved by throwing Teelyman's bull calf in under twenty seconds at Mr. Halliday's annual free Juneday party at the Lantern Hill resort. He resented Moses' advice and suspected that the old man sometimes deliberately swung shipyard talk around to make it apply to himself. It was, Chid recognized, a cute way to watch and guide him without seeming to. And Moses, Chid knew, felt a responsibility for bringing him up decently, just as Aunt Leety felt responsible for his clothes and his cleanliness.

After a while Chid didn't set every Sunday aside for a visit at the Leets'. He skipped it, and church too, and usually when he did so, it was because his new crony, Nez Nott, had concocted some bit of adventure much more to Chid's liking. And Nez Nott, parents held, was not good company for their sons.

NEZ wasn't bad, but you had to know him to find that out. Most folks judged him unkindly because Nez never took the pains to make a favorable impression. He was concerned only with the physical business of living, living with the most fun and the least work, matters which everybody really was after but wasn't open and aboveboard about. Nez would work until he had achieved his uncomplicated wants. Then he would quit abruptly, and folks branded him shiftless. He wasn't. He worked hard, even at the simple chore of providing food, for inshore fishing and upland hunting were no longer the easy tasks they had been for settlers. Nez was an expert at both, and he considered it utterly silly to work for money to buy what he wanted when it was so much more fun getting it direct.

As he grew older and wanted things besides food, he had taken to periods of work at the Tatum yard; usually in the spar loft where his untiring strength could elevate rough logs to sound smooth spars as quickly as any journeyman who really knew the trade. But his taste ran only to cheap dunder rum, in which he contended there was just as much fun as in straight Martinique or Jamaican, and so he wasn't on Asa Tatum's payroll very often or for very long at a time.

Chid supposed he envied Nez his freedom more than anything else. But it used to strike him as almighty queer that Nez didn't use his freedom as he himself would. Chid's idea of freedom was not to loaf and keep clear of responsibilities; quite the opposite. Freedom was opportunity; a chance to put to work some of the notions which Moses Leet, in his honest old-fashioned way, had branded cheating. That he would soon have it, and without that hindering wait until August, Chid was now certain.

It depended a lot upon this Mr. Brown and how he'd take Chid's proposition. Chid hadn't met a mortal yet who could argue for keeps against hard cash. Noah

Brown, who was a Stamford man, and had the largest shipyard in New York, save perhaps the famous one of Henry Eckford, had had his agent buy in the Tatum yard before the old man was fair cold. Chid didn't know what he wanted it for. But he did know that Mr. Brown now owned his apprenticeship papers, and not a respectable privateer skipper on the coast would sign on a hand who was still bound out to another.

Old Beemis stopped the team at the foot of Tatum Hill. The great white clapboarded house with the widow's walk perched above the snow-covered roof frowned down, throwing an edgeless purple shadow on the drifted snow of the flanking hill fields.

Chid brought out Nez's bottle of rum and handed it to the old man. Beemis grasped it with rude eagerness, letting it gurgle steadily at his lips until Chid took it away. Chid took a generous nip for himself, letting the liquor warm him, then handed it back. "You had a dollar's worth first draw," he said, "and it's prime Martinique, but you can have it all."

Beemis belched his appreciation, and without a word spanked the reins on the rumps of the horses. They plodded slowly up the hill, making slippery work of it; then, at the top, turned into the circular drive before the Tatum house. Chid helped Mrs. Tatum into the house, letting her lean heavily on his arm.

She seemed very small and fragile. She walked slowly, with a curious uncertainty foreign to any Tatum and, it struck Chid, bravely. He placed her in a chair before the grate fire. Cooking odors came into the rich quiet room, and Chid guessed that Mrs. Palmer and Aunt Leety and perhaps Mary were in there, come to be neighborly to the old lady in those first empty hours.

"Stay to sup, Chidsy," Mrs. Tatum said, as her ladies took her wraps and filled the foot warmer with coals. "Asa asked you many a time, but you never came."

"No, ma'm," said Chid, not remembering that Old Man Tatum had ever mentioned the matter. "I've got some business down-street. I'll be riding in with Beem."

"If it's Mr. Brown you have your business with," she said, watching Chid keenly, "it will do you no good, Chidsy. Moses Leet and I made him agree to finish you. Asa and Moses both say you'll go far, but you need journeyman's papers. So you'll be off to New York, more than like, making yourself into what you started out to be. Mr. Brown has plans for you, Chidsy."

"Yes'm," Chid said. He didn't care about others' plans for himself, and it made him suddenly hotly angry, having plans which concerned him made without consulting him. But he said nothing to Mrs. Tatum, acting polite and regretful that he couldn't stay.

"You're a good boy, Chidsy," Mrs. Tatum said. "We were afraid you might take notions to go off with Captain Fish."

Chid said good-night then. It startled him somewhat, though, finding that folks had read his intentions so easily and accurately.

BEEMIS had finished the bottle. He was in a genial rummy mood, calling his horses Tom Jefferson and Tom Driddle because they denoted the end of everything, and, he prattled, half-drunk, that it was the end of driving those damned horses for him. The job made a man too thirsty, he said, and anyway he was a prime sea cook, used to stewing horses, not driving them.

"Fish's marine captain was askin' 'round," Beemis confided, breathing heavily at Chid. "He's got interestin' articles fer them as you might call reg'lar."

"What's so interesting about them?"

"Gard!" Beemis hiccoughed, "I dassn't say, Chidsy."

"Shut up," Chid said. "Your blood must be pure dunder. What makes you talk so?"

"I'm sober, Chidsy, too damn sober; that's what. It makes a man's mind wander, bein' sober. He sees things an' hears 'em. Fortunate I recollect I got a tiny smitch o' dunder stowed on me. Now ain't that nice, Chidsy-mate? Ain't it so, boy?"

Chid paid him no heed. Beemis was

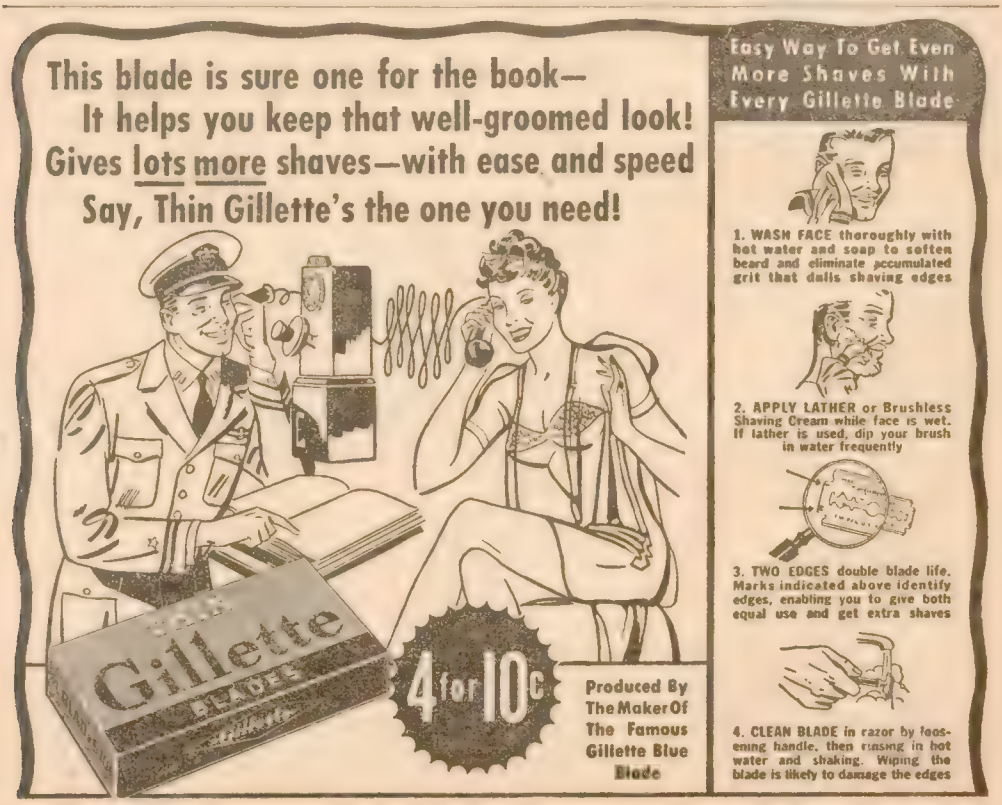
a sot, beyond mortal help. Two bells, mentioned by Nez, was only three hours away. And dreams, Chid had learned, didn't come true without a good rugged mortal push. Providing nothing went wrong he had time aplenty to push his dreams along famously before the *Blessed Cause* sailed.

MR. HALLIDAY'S Wagon's and Seamen's stood with inviting nearness to the junction of the Post Road short cut and the boggy lane which led seaward over the marshes to the fishing wharves of Noank at the river-mouth. Anybody waiting for the ferry or a change of stage horses was bound to yield to landlord Halliday's intriguing house. During the day the signboard—surmounted by a huge rum cask on which, in brass shoe nails, was outlined the shape of an anchor—could be seen from fifty rods in either direction, or from the opposite eastern shore of the Mystic and the road which led, eventually, to Providence and the Bay Colony. Often some of the bar maids, by which name Mr. Halliday hired them, disposed themselves upon the broad veranda which overlooked the salt field between the house and the river, adding promise to a tarry there.

At night Mr. Halliday was careful to keep a welcome light in every front window and smoke coming from at least two chimneys if the weather was at all raw. But tonight, in spite of the usual lights which were ordinarily used by homeward bound fare smackers as the ranges for the Ram Island out-channel, Chid was not aware of them until, appearing like witch's fire in a woodland swale, the carriage was suddenly upon them and the post yard door made a white blur in the storm.

Beemis pulled up the team with a good-natured drunken curse. "Jump, boy," he said. "Listen, you be heedin' Nez's message, be'nt you? I'll tell him, Chidsy."

"Don't tell Nez anything," Chid said. "Just wanting ain't doing. I can't say till I've done some trading in here."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2. APPLY LATHER or Brushless Shaving Cream while face is wet. If lather is used, dip your brush in water frequently
3. TWO EDGES double blade life. Marks indicated above identify edges, enabling you to give both equal use and get extra shaves
4. CLEAN BLADE in razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges

"Well, that's a howdeedo indeed," Bemis croaked. "Three bottles the captain sent you by Nez, and you don't make answer." He straightened suddenly, regarding Chid with a cunning look. "Chid," he said, honeying his words, "that 'ere message o' Nez's was a almighty effort rememberin', 'twas."

"Here," said Chid, understanding and handing the old man Nez's second flask of rum, which he'd tucked in his pocket when it had come to him at noon. "I don't use it regular anyway."

Beemis took a long draught, holding his woolen muffler under his chin to keep the swirling snow from blowing down his neck. When he couldn't do any longer without breathing, he brought the flask to his lap. "Chid," he said, "actual I on'y wanted a sip, but I took a fair helpin' so's it'ud be a lesson to you. You talk too belittlin' about rum, an' you'll come to no good on Preserved Fish's command takin' that attitude. Privateerin' is bloody business, boy, an' rum helps keep yer insides stowed down nice when yer mates' limbs commence dwindlin'."

"Let 'em dwindle. The whole crew can die of the rum horrors for all I care," Chid said, dropping to the road. "It'll be that many fewer to share the prize money with. That's all I want to sail for. Beem, you go straight to the stables and stay there till you're sober. Don't you go out afoot in this, and don't light any candles; you'd have the place afire in no time the way you are."

"Ar-r-r," Beemis growled, "on'y two flasks an' a smitch, minus yer own swillin'. an' you name me drunk. What's younkers come to these days?"

Beemis didn't expect an answer. He slumped into his coat and drove off abruptly. He didn't like it, though, and long ago, as a boy, he had learned to depend upon simple things. His authority was General Stark, and he would quote him often, like a passage from the Holy Scriptures.

" 'Rum, kettles an' bullets', sez he," Beemis would croak, never caring who was his audience, " 'vital military stores,' sez Stark; 'got to have 'em,' sez he to Genril Washington, an' I heard 'im say it. An' I ain't fergit; not never, fer it's damn good stores, any place, I hold. I was drivin' one o' the supply carts up to Bennington, where we was to turn back Baum an' his pretty Hessians. Well, Genril Stark, he overtook me like an' he stopped an' he sez, sincere as a owl, 'Boys, whip up yer nags. The hull damned army's waitin' on you boys.'

" 'Genril,' sez I, man to man, 'we got a powerful load, an' whoever laid out this goddamn road humped her over every quagmire in the blasted state.' 'I reckon they did,' the Genril said, 'but, boys, if you get into trouble, jest lighten yer load. Pitch out the kettles, then the bullets, but no matter what, fetch up that rum. This is a war we're fightin'." An' off goes me Genril. It's a solemn leason, ain't it now, gents?

"Take that Chidsy Alwyn," Beemis mumbled to the team as it plodded toward the livery stable without the help of reins. "He's got problems, he has. Here's Nez Nott, bringin' prime rum, an' opporchunity opens a door to fair spoils fer the lad; money an' station an' such. Does the lad whoop? Nossir, he don't. He squarms 'round with his insides which hev been poisoned by that there reverend an' Moses Leet an' wimin folks, an he lets them binderin' things annoy the hell outen him, tryin' to solve his problems cold sober.

"Make yer pile now, Chidsy, an damn yer scruples or whatever's a-holdin' o' you. . . . Oh, you went an' skedaddled on me, hey? You leave a old man out in a wicked gale, all alone, like he never give you no wisdom an' good advice. Damn you, Chidsy! 'Don't make no light,' sez you; like I was drunk! Blast you, Chidsy!"

Beemis lurched to the stable doors and opened them, hiccoughing gently, at about the same moment that Chid, having spent some minutes peering through the sash into Mr. Halliday's tap room on the lower floor to size up his man and the situation in general, opened the post yard door.

NOAH BROWN, though it was but six o'clock, had finished his supper and, with the board cleared save for a candle and a writing folio, occupied one end of

a small round table near the great chunk fire.

He was a slight, wiry man, suggestive of hard muscles beneath his severe broadcloth jacket, and he wore, though he wasn't much more than thirty, a rich brown full beard. His eyes, too, were brown, and kind and quick. Chid had a feeling as he stood inside the plank door shaking off the snow and stamping some heat into his feet, that those eyes without seeming to were measuring him, taking his gauge, as they might size up a hard pine log and see it already whipsawed into understandable decking and planking and spars.

Mr. Halliday, who had been elbow-leaning on his mahogany-wood bar, nodded to Chid, then turned to Mr. Brown. "This here," he said, "is Chidsy Alwyn, sir. He's one on your list."

Noah Brown looked directly at Chid and made a small bow. "A pleasure, Mr. Alwyn," he said cordially. "Come and join me. We've some business, I believe."

Chid had never bowed before in his life. He considered it a Tory habit, or, at least, an effeminate habit of magistrates, preachers, and such. But he felt himself compelled to bow now, and he made a clumsy attempt, which spilled melted snow water from his hat brim onto the table as he ducked his head. Mr. Halliday guffawed, but Mr. Brown made no sign that he had noticed, and Chid felt a queer quick appreciation for it.

Once before Chid had tried to buy his freedom. The cry of Free Trade and Seamen's Rights and No Search of Yankee Ships was thick and challenging in the air. Chid did not fully understand the meaning of the slogans, but they had all sounded grand, coupled with the fifes of the recruiters and the yarns of adventure which the genial tarry-haired frigate men told around Mr. Halliday's fire.

Chid had listened to frigate men entranced. When a regular navy recruiter came, passing the word that he'd stand the score for all who would join and listen, the Stars and Stripes flew over the tavern post yard. It flew to a monkey gaff on a lightning-shivered elm, and it was said that the gaff had come from the *Cerebus* frigate which Mr. Bushnell had blown right out of the English fleet with a device called a submarine. Sometimes, the privateersmen would come and the stark rattlesnake flag flew beneath the ensign. The rum then was the best Martinique, served without measuring, and its fire roused men to prideful resentment at England's wrongs.

Chid had listened to them all, and had taken his small savings to Old Man Tatum, meaning to buy back his apprenticeship. The old man had just laughed, giving no answer in words. It was Moses Leet who had tried to set Chid straight.

"One o' the matters we got to pervide against, Chidsy," he said after his nap one Sunday, making out to discuss the shipyard problems as always, "is to see that our young lads don't go off to war onthinkin'. This war ain't like 'twas in seventy-seven. We was fightin' then for our homes an' our families an' our lives; for a nation wantin' to be born. But this war ain't nuthin' but a bit o' licensed murder an' piracy. Any man with a ten-ton bottom's allowed a letter o' marque an' all the prizes he can rob the sea of. This, lad, is a war for the moneybags an' the Southern politicians, an' they expect New England to fight for 'em. An' New England, Chid, is jest greedy enough to do it pervidin' it can share in the loot."

"Free trade and seamen's rights!" Chid had said, making it sound glorious. "It's time we showed England we're entitled to respect; that we're free men and a great nation—the greatest on earth someday. If Mr. Tatum would free me, I'd fight tonight," Chid said. "But he won't. Don't you kind of feel different when you see the flag, proud and waving?"

"Depends"—Moses said solemnly—"depends entire on who waves it."

CHAPTER III

OF MONEY AND THE FLAG

MANY of the privateers had come into the river to fit out after sea roving. Chid had seen the shot holes, and the awful havoc of chain and bar shot, and

once, planing dried blood off a bleached pine deck he had found a withered human hand wedged bloodily into a solid oak bulwark stanchion.

Bob Crown's brother, Roswell, came in on his sinking brig with both legs shot off at the knee; the stumps dabbed with hot tar and the smell of decaying flesh beneath stronger than the tar itself. He had died as his brother Bob was leaving to fetch the mother. He had died smiling, his eyes shining with a holy light and riveted to the shot-torn ensign on the mizzen gaff and his ears ringing with the promise of Mr. Lidbody, of Noank, the owner, to take good care of his mother.

The Crowns could have used the money, Bob's father having been taken by a British press gang six years ago. But they never got a cent of it. Mr. Lidbody claimed, making an affidavit to the prize court at New London, that Roswell Crown had been a stowaway and therefore not entitled to share. It had made Chid's blood boil, opening his eyes to much, and Nez Nott, who was Bob's friend too, in his direct way, had picked a fight with Mr. Lidbody and thrashed him soundly, then disappeared for a while.

After that, Chid saw that Moses Leet was right—it wasn't a war for their lives and homes and way of living, but licensed pirating by which a few men were making great fortunes and many men were dying.

Mr. Tatum at one time decided to build a fighting ship, a gift from the town to the navy. Salem had once so presented the frigate *Essex* to the government. It would honor the name of the town, and, if the ship was all Mr. Tatum expected, result in orders for more. Chid himself had worked on the vessel, a large fair-lined schooner said to be modeled after the old slave carriers. He was proud of it, and so was the town until Congress sent a commission to inspect it.

Portersville never forgave the commission. Nothing was right about the vessel; it was not what they conceived a fighting ship to be. Some of the innovations which Mr. Tatum had installed were considered impractical in the extreme. Especial criticism was leveled at the revolving platform on the quarterdeck upon which a long gun had been mounted for quick independent aiming. Mr. Tatum named some nasty names, and he wrote letters to Washington about stupid politicians and blind navy pups with hidebound ideas, and in the end fitted the vessel out as a privateer and sold her to Captain Preserved Fish, a strange little man of uncertain origin but with plenty of hard csah. Fish took the schooner out on one short cruise, came back satisfied, not saying where he'd been, and immediately set up table at Mr. Halliday's. He called the schooner *Blessed Cause*, some said with his tongue in his cheek.

Chid, impatient for August, had wanted to join from the first drink. But it was not for patriotic reasons now. He had ample proof that this was a war for self and not for the nation, and privateers made money. Chid had seen their crews throw coins to the niggers and raggies as if it were so much hen corn. He'd seen the belly-bank of Zodac Kimble, an unkempt dirty seaman at Mr. Halliday's where the man drank the very best rum and kept the girls behaving their cutest while he worked the sea out of his throat and his mind.

He was off the *Blessed Cause*, which was in the river for sparring and fitting out. In a blaze of coin-throwing he left for New Hampshire, where, he told Chid, he'd be farmer king of the whole town of Derry. The picture of Zodac with money and situation appealed to Chid and fitted into his dreams. He thought now more than ever of the shipyard he wanted and of the ships to be built to satisfy Congress' sudden awakening to the necessity of bottoms to fight and win this war.

It pleased him to know that he could see clearly how things were, not as the catchy phrases and slogans would have him. His ambitions were large and expensive, and on all hands was opportunity. A man had but to get after it—and before this war was over, one way or the other, and it was too late. Even August, seven months in the future, might be too late.

Nez, admiring Chid, was for privateer-

ing, but he wasn't wholeheartedly for the idea of money. "What in shadders d'you want it for?" he asked Chid. "It's but an excuse. A good man don't need no excuse to do things; he jest does 'em because he wants to. Goin' fightin' for money ain't ary a bit more fun than fightin' fer the flag an' such. Whyn't you jest call it sport an' go?"

"Everything reduces itself to money," Chid had answered, "even patriotism, seems if. It's a handy kind of a way to express everything in creation, I guess."

"COME set," said Mr. Brown. "I've a friend coming later that I want you Tatum men to meet. But first we'll do our business."

"I'm not ready to do any business yet," Chid said. "I got to see Mr. Driddle first."

"You'll not see Tom Driddle now," Mr. Halliday grinned, "leastwise not if you know what's good for you. Chid, he's right engaged, you might say."

Mr. Halliday ducked his head toward the kitchen. Chid understood, but it didn't stop him. He hung his coat on the stag horn, and, saying nothing, strode into the kitchen. Mr. Driddle sat beside the fireplace deep in the embrace of a deacon chair, and on his knee, deep in his own embrace, sat one of Mr. Halliday's girls. Chid didn't care about that. If Mr. Driddle wanted to play the fool every time he made a dollar, it was his own business as long as he didn't play it with Chid's money. "Mr. Driddle," Chid said, "you want to talk to me here or where?"

"Not here, boy," Mr. Driddle said hastily, and stood up.

They went into the back hall, standing under the wall sconce with the single fat candle. "Them gurls is like beagle dogs," he complained. "They can smell cash a thousand miles off. Twenty-five, you said, Chid?"

"A hundred, I said."

"I swear to Hannah you didn't!" Mr. Driddle croaked. "Come to recollect, it might have been fifty."

"Hand it over," Chid said, and counted the money.

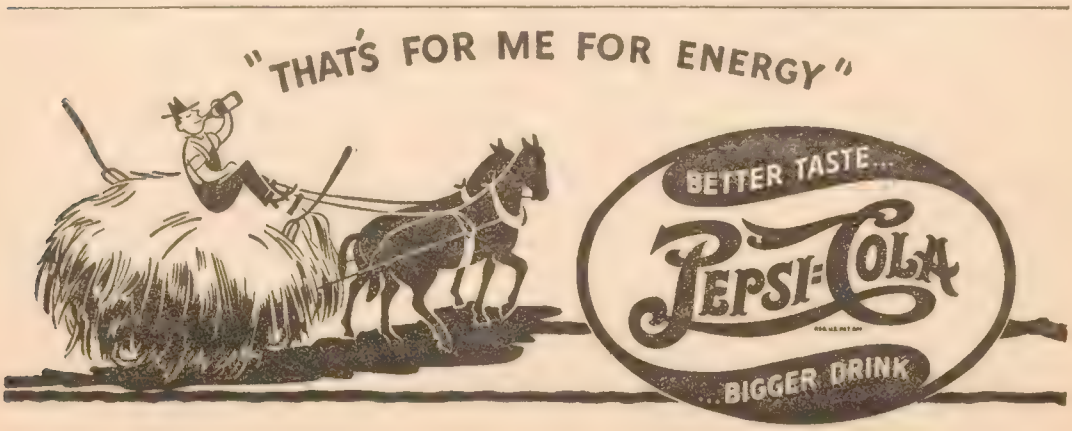
Chid folded the money and stowed it, not wanting it to show as a prosperous wad and start any false ideas with Mr. Brown. It was remarkable, the buoyant confidence actual possession of the money gave him. He'd never before had so much money at one time, and so had never dared dream to the extent that he dreamt now.

Chid felt a different man when he again stood before Mr. Brown. He had no inclination to bow. He walked right to the table, calling to Mr. Halliday for a cold joint in half a loaf and a mug of flip. "Yes, sir," Chid said. "We had some business."

"A small matter," said Mr. Brown opening his writing folio. "Mr. Alwyn—or Chidsy, if I may, please—I've bought in Mr. Tatum's yard, lock, stock and barrel, and that includes your apprenticeship papers. You've until August next to serve them out, right?"

"That's right," Chid said, and waited.

He liked the man. There was an appealing directness and openness about him that Chid appreciated. Checking

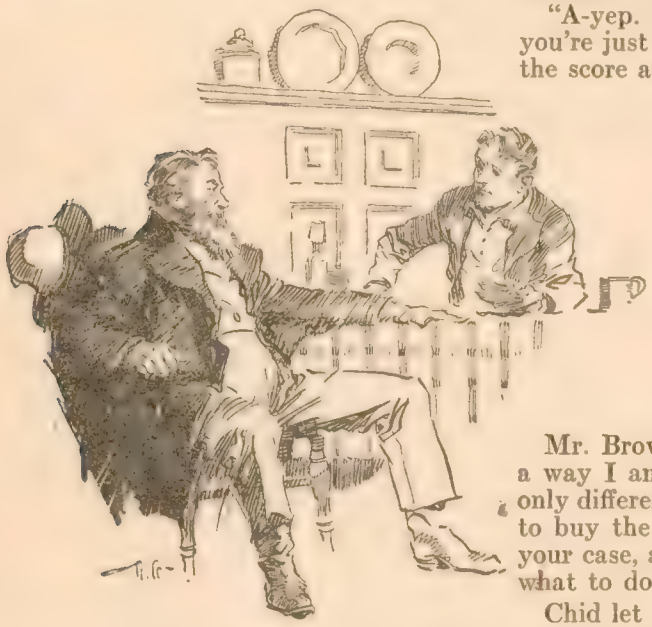


his information that way showed him a careful man. There was no real reason to think of him, as Chid had, as an enemy. Chid laid his money on the table.

Mr. Brown pursed his lips and looked at it, but he didn't touch it. He sat back in his chair, studying Chid, his brown eyes darting over Chid's face. "You want to buy out?" he asked finally.

"A-yep," said Chid.

Ruby, the kitchen girl brought Chid's food and flip, the spice of the drink mixing with the steam from the hot finger water always supplied with a cold joint. Chid tore off a piece of the beef, washing



Chid laid his money on the table. Mr. Brown pursed his lips and looked at it, but he didn't touch it. He sat back in his chair, studying Chid.

it down with the flip. Mr. Brown hadn't moved. He still watched Chid.

"Moses Leet mentioned that this might happen, Chidsy," he said. "I paid little heed; apprentices usually don't have the price. Have you thought any why I should buy a small shipyard, remote from my own city, Chidsy?"

"Yes, sir," Chid said. "To get hold of Tatum's white oak stand. There ain't but small stands left any place in New England, and I guess New York way there ain't none at all."

"Well, that's good news," Mr. Brown said softly, seemingly pleased. "I hadn't known that I bought a timber stand, to tell the truth, but it will be welcome indeed. Well, Chidsy, I bought the yard to get hold of some shipbuilding talent, yourself and the other apprentices most assuredly included."

CHID didn't stop chewing. He pushed the money nearer. "It's eighty dollars," Chid said, not bothering to hide the triumph in his voice.

"Eighty's a handsome sum," Mr. Brown said. "Ordinarily 'twould be fair. But in this case that many thousand wouldn't do it. A boss bigger than you or me needs men. The name is Uncle Jonathan. Know him, Chidsy?"

"A-yep. Plenty," said Chid. "So you're just a recruiter. Mostly they pay the score and wave a flag."

Mr. Brown chuckled, not angry. "In a way I am," he said pleasantly. "The only difference is that I don't feel obliged to buy the drinks. You see, Chidsy, in your case, all I have to do is to tell you what to do."

Chid let it sink in. That his cash was without power was hard for him to understand. But he couldn't misdoubt the finality of Noah Brown's refusal of it. He reached for the folded bills, hesitating before pocketing them.

"No," said Mr. Brown, "put your money away. You're worth twenty times that to the nation. Fifty of you are worth all the gold in New England."

"There's a heap of it," Chid said eating again, not wanting to show how he was feeling.

"A mighty heap, counting what was British and French."

"I was figuring to get me some of the British kind."

"Moses Leet guessed so," Mr. Brown nodded. "So did Mrs. Tatum. Don't let

the rattlesnake flag fool you, boy. That's not the flag for patriots."

"It didn't," Chid said. "I wanted the prize money. There's just a writing between me and it."

"You wouldn't want law trouble," said Mr. Brown, smiling.

"No. I wouldn't want any kind of trouble."

"After this is over," Noah Brown said, trying to understand Chid, "we'll have times such as the Union never saw before. There'll be plenty of opportunity for a man to make money; lots and lots of money. Now the job is to win this war, get it over with and out of the way and be ready to trade on the great name we'll have among nations. Are you a Massachusetts man, Chidsy?"

"Nope. Mystic River. But we're just as sore as the Baymen. We've been starving for seven years. It took the rest of the country till now to feel the bad times they created enough to fight. We were ready ten years ago. Now your war's nothing to us unless it pays us."

"It's not my war," Mr. Brown said. "It's ours, yours and mine and everybody else's. A fair man will grant that Mr. Jefferson hurt your New England with his embargo. What she needs, perhaps, is another hurt to really rouse her. And it seems as if she might be getting it any day. You understand what I'm saying, Chidsy?"

"A-yep," Chidsy nodded, "but I don't care."

"I think you will; all of us will, in time," Mr. Brown said quietly. "I'm here to do my small part in preventing that other hurt. It's why I need you and the other apprentices and every able-bodied shipwright that I can talk or argue into it."

"You got Bob Crown?"

"Earlier this evening; yes. And Sylvester Tatro and the Coon's boy and the others. You're the only one that's balked, and I don't know why I'm talking so to you instead of giving you your orders. I expect it's because I can see in you something I had myself not so long ago. But I got over it, Chidsy, and you will, too."

"I'm curious," Chid said. "Mrs. Tatum mentioned New York."

"That's where we start from," Mr. Brown said. "From there we go to the Great Lakes, beyond Niagara. The nation needs a navy up there to stop that hurt which threatens New England."

"What'm I to do to prevent it?" Chid asked.

"Help build the fleet I mentioned—in the best time any fleet was ever built, and with the greenest, worst stock and against the blindest, most incompetent Naval Affairs Committee any country was ever burdened with. But we'll do it, Chidsy—you and the Bob Crowns and the veterans of seventy-seven."

"Sounds like a big order, and not much profit," Chid said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Just stand by until the party has been formed. I expect a naval officer here from Newport any moment, name of Perry. He'll do the recruiting of those we can't order up with us. I hope to get along by noon tomorrow the latest."

"How about our tools?"

"Gone this afternoon, by packet to New York. I'm glad to see you're agreeable, Chidsy. You'll be proud of your part in all this some day, and you'll have your trade and full journeyman's papers from the Noah Brown yard. A man couldn't be better fitted for the future."

"Well," said Chid, "he might be fitted out with hard cash, seems if."

CHID rose. The tap room was filling rapidly, and the tobacco smoke of forty clay and iron pipes was beginning to thicken the warm air. Ruby and Jerushy scurried among the tables with trays of flip and mulled ale, and Mr. Halliday, keeping score as fast as he could write on the slate, beamed happily on the room.

Chid knew most of the men. They were almost all Tatum men, now suddenly unemployed again, and curious as to the meaning of the summons to Mr. Halliday's house. It was after seven, but the Providence coach had not yet arrived. Chid guessed it had been delayed by the storm and that this man Perry would be on it.

He was glad he'd had sense enough not to pass his word. Then it would have

been binding. So far he'd just listened and it left him still free. The bound agreement didn't bother him; that had been made for him by others and he wasn't concerned with the right or wrong of breaking that. It was simply a question of which would pay best, to ship with Captain Fish and risk law trouble with Mr. Brown, as promised, or wait until August when he would be free of the long agreement.

It struck Chid as odd to see Moses Leet in the crowd. Moses, as far as he knew, had never before set foot in Mr. Halliday's place. Chid said "howdo" to him as always. But it was odd, seeing him there.

The day that Old Man Tatum had died, Moses, after supper that evening, had told his family that he was quitting for good. Chid had been there. "Forty-seven years, stiddy save wars, I been buildin' o' ships. I ain't got the venture in me to start anew for another boss now. My bones git almighty tired lately. I put it by when I made it," he told them, hiding his pride, "an' naow I'm jest goin' to rest; me and mother. I reckon anyway Mary mayn't be about ferever—and mother'd jest hev to hev me on hand to keep her out o' mischief."

The bar talk was of this northern place which Mr. Brown, when questioned, had mentioned. He gave no great amount of information, saying he'd rather have Captain Perry give the details. It was a waiting time, during which men took extra drinks, and wondered what was in store for them now. Times had been good these last months. Old Man Tatum's death and the sale of the yard had been a shock.

"Where in creation's Presque Isle?" one of the gravers wanted to know.

"You mean Sackett's Harbor," Mr. Diggins said. "It's on some lake to North'ard, where Henry Eckford's got his gang to framin' up some more o' those damned Jefferson gunboats."

"I mean Presque Isle, the place mentioned by him." The graver ducked his head toward Mr. Brown, still at his table. "Sounds damn Frenchy to me. You don't get me goin' to no foreign country. Dang it, we got our own troubles right here in the States."

"Presque Isle," said the schoolteacher, who lived at Mr. Halliday's steady, "is on Lake Erie, way up t'other end of Pennsylvania, but you go through York State to reach it from here. And it's not French. It's not even American—just an old fort that nobody wants save maybe the greedy British. A man would be fool to go there. Even the French couldn't abide it."

"It must've been pretty goddamn bad then."

"Turrible. Lake fever and varmints and begging Indians thicker'n owls in a grain barn, though I 'spect they're some tamed by now. Couldn't say, a man hears so many damnfool tales about Indians. Any of you gents goin'?"

The ready chorus of no's made Chid grin. It was his own decision too. He'd hung fire for a while wondering if Mr. Brown would elaborate on his proposition, but he remained cordial but uncommunicative. Seems if—Chid thought—a man took a contract to build ships in a place that even a Frenchman had abandoned, he would be smart to estimate on some extra pay. It wasn't reasonable to expect a man to leave his home and family and the neighborhood of at least some opportunity unless he could make extra handsome wages out of it. Mr. Brown hadn't mentioned wages.

CHAPTER IV

"HE ALSO SERVES WITH ADZE AND OAKUM"

THE captain of marines from the *Blessed Cause* came in flanked by two snow-covered hands each armed with a cutlass and a boarding pike.

"All hands for the *Blessed Cause,* Cap'n Fish," he bawled, looking truculently about the room, "report on board at once. The cap'n sails tonight." His eyes caught Chid. "You Chidsy Alwyn?" he asked.

"A-yep."

"Well, drag your feet then. You're signed."

"I'm not," Chid said, not bothering to move from his draped position over the bar.

"Mr. Nott says you did."

"Nez Nott lies," Chid said. "He only wishes I had."

"I'll tell him," the captain snarled. "He won't fancy bein' named a liar! Godamighty help you if you are lyin'! I'll tend to you personal."

"Come on," Chid said, "tend to me."

They glared at each other for a long moment, but it was the marine's glance that wavered. Chid laughed lightly. The captain stamped off into the night looking as if he was genuinely sorry that he'd failed to find some hands to be marched off to the ship at cutlass point. Chid couldn't say why he still hesitated. He had only to leave silently. No one would miss him; not until it was too late, anyway.

The door opened, and Nez Nott came in. He was a sparse bony lad, though not tall, with a hooked Yankee nose, like a New Hampshireman from which state Nez had heard the Notts had originally come. He was a year older than Chid, and troubled by no indecisions. He'd promised Captain Fish long ago, and signed the articles that morning.

He'd been after Chid all day to join too. He came right to Chid now, and had sense enough to keep his voice low. "Great airth an' seas!" he said. "Chid, what in blazes d'you want o' the capting anyway? You got twice the rum o' most. Whyn't you show up on board, like you been preachin' since Gosh knows when? I d'clare, you make me into a prime liar, Chid."

"You are. What'd you tell 'em I signed on for?"

"Well," Nez said, rubbing his neck, "I was that sure you would. I was bein' ragged about knowin' a chicken-heart, an' I jest had do say suthin'."

"Well, I'm coming. But, look out; Noah Brown wouldn't sell back my papers, and I got to sneak it. Nez, there better be some mighty important prize money. I'm letting myself in for a pack of trouble."

"Thought you said money'd buy anythin'. Won't it buy a little peace from trouble?"

"A-yep," Chid laughed, "I reckon enough of it will. You get along, Nez. I'll be along immediate."

Nez left, and before the door had slammed, his face appeared beyond the candle in the window, watching Chid. At the same moment a jingle of harness bells sounded in the postyard and the mail pouch thumped mushily against the kitchen door. Mr. Halliday shouted for the hostler, and thrust half a dozen pokers into the fire to be ready for touching up the cider.

Mr. Brown folded his writing folio and, draining the last of his wine, stood waiting at the door.

"I expect that's Captain Perry—Oliver Hazard Perry," he said—with relief, it seemed to Chid. "I'd take it as a personal favor, gentlemen, if you'd listen him out. I can only show you how to build ships. Mr. Perry can show you your duty."

"Hell," said Chid, and spit, "another recruiter."

"What?" inquired Mr. Halliday.

"Recruiter!" Chid growled. "Now Congress wants shipbuilders. There's no end to it."

"Oh!" Mr. Halliday grinned and rubbed his hands. "Ruby, have the black boy broach another cask o' rum an' warm your mugs ready. Chid, I hope this war continues forever. It keeps the gov'mint in commotion—an' commotion makes a thirst like nuthin' else I ever see," and he winked broadly at Chid and jingled the coins in his poke.

THE landlord had a table cleared and ready for Captain Perry. His smile of welcome was his best, and Mr. Halliday, remembering the frigate men who had run up a regular New Year's Day score and paid for it in gold, couldn't help the prosperous twist that his smile took.

"This way, sir," Mr. Halliday beamed. "This 'ere table, sir; me greatest. Tom, you lazy plague o' landlords, bresh the snow off'n the gentleman. Your cape, sir . . . thankee kindly. You'll find the Wagon's and Seamen's has all the comforts an' ye've but to raise your wind'ard eye to have me complete attenshun, sir." His voice grew cunning and confidential, "An', lookit, sir, I never did hold wi' the gov'ment starvin' o' you navy men; never. Say the word an' I'll let 'er rain into

the rum. More'n genrilly, y'understand, hah! An' you'll get two scores, a big un an' a right un, and you pay the one you're a mind to. What's fairer?—all receipted neat an' in order fer your fleet clerk. Tom, draw what the gentleman wishes; on the house, Tom."

But Mr. Halliday might have saved his welcome and broaching a fresh rum cask too. Oliver Hazard Perry was no ordinary recruiter. Relieved of his wool sea cape and his boots swept of the clinging snow by Tom, Perry brushed past Mr. Halliday, paying him no heed, and greeted Mr. Brown with quiet cordiality. He sat down immediately, taking the rum from Tom and downing it in one draught, marking him a deep-water man, a thing that did not go unnoticed. Mr. Halliday stood at his elbow in confusion; then stood guard over the large table which he had prepared as if he still had hopes of its use.

Perry was no run-of-the-deck naval officer. His figure and his face were slight, and his features small and delicate, almost girlish. He wore his hair, which was a rich soft brown, brushed in a wavy fold across his forehead, and long curling sidewhiskers lay softly on each cheek. He had on the full dress uniform, in the manner of the French with a stock and black silk cravat, the collar being ornamented with three gold stripes, the lower one of which swirled into a shoulder peak and then followed the jacket edge to the break of the swallowtail. On each shoulder was a heavy gold bullion epaulet, draped with easy lines which made them look like small golden wings.

The first impression to the men in Mr. Halliday's taproom was that this quiet refined officer, obviously a gentleman come to rank via midshipmanship and not through the hawse-hole and pitch barrel, was somewhat of a dandy and a fop. The impression was borne out by his voice. It was delicate and well modulated and extremely low, but audible and authoritative even though the full womanish lips scarcely moved when he spoke. No one could ever imagine that voice raised in shouting, or in harsh anger.

Perry was in his middle twenties, but his weather-seasoned face and hands bespoke the man of long, active sea service. There was, to prove it, a distinct roll in his gait—as if, as he'd entered, he had expected Mr. Halliday's scrubbed chestnut floor to heave to the lift of a sea at any step. After he had downed his rum, he sat slouched in his splint arm chair, crossed feet extended fore-and-aft and his eyes roving aloft as if to gauge the set of a tall ship's canvas, as a skipper might on his quarterdeck in pleasant trade-wind weather. Noah Brown talked, quietly and earnestly, bri[illegible] understanding nod from P[illegible] to time.

"Bless the child," grov[illegible] gers, whispering to his neighbors at the board where the mulled drinks were served, "I ain't a mite surprised the navy ships a double set o' spars on its vessels. How's a childer like him to know when to reef an' douse an' when to set his stuns'ls?"

"Batten it," Moses Leet said mildly, drinking nothing. "This man's a fightin' man, I hear say. He l'arned the Barbary heathens a lesson, an' he served on the *Constitution*. What would you have? A wizened old capting like the British have for everything over a sloop rate? I'll lay this man'll sail a ship as well as fight her."

"Gunboats!" sneered Mr. Diggers. "Mis'able Jefferson gunboats! I hear'n on his command too—up to Newport. Thutty o' the things, all layin' nice to permanent mud hooks an' never makin' gunfire the hull war through."

"Shet up," Chid said. "If he'd just but look at you, you'd scrape to your belly. We got a fair proposition from Mr. Brown. Listen the man out."

CHID'S reaction to Perry was entirely positive. Instinctively, as he had liked Mr. Brown, he liked this man. He'd certainly rather, if he had to, follow a man like Perry, young and possessed and so capable appearing, than some of the coarse, profane bosuns and petty officers who had come to recruit in the past.

This man Perry, not so very much older than Chid himself, was obviously human. Chid admired his carriage and his manner and his self-assurance. These

qualities, in a faint un-understood way, checked with something deep within him, with an ambition or a dream peopled by a similar possessed intelligent being who, in the dream, was Chidsy Alwyn.

When Noah Brown introduced Perry to the company, there was a general movement of the men toward the table. Mr. Halliday beamed, but the usual invitation did not come. Chid thought he would have [illegible] strain to hear the words, [illegible]ey, but, oddly, the tap- [illegible] as a church.

[illegible] to address you as fellow [illegible]erry said, standing and as at ease as if he were talking to a single well-known friend. "I haven't much to say. I'm not going to have our landlord serve you spirits and then, drunk and muddled, carry you off to serve articles that you would not recall signing.

"Our country, gentlemen, needs shipwrights as sorely as it needs soldiers and seamen. But it needs them sober and loyal and bound to service only by their love of these United States and the worthwhileness of what they are doing. I can't hold out much to you, not much at all. No prize money, exceedingly few comforts, a determined, stubborn and well organized enemy, and time as scarce as trade in New England."

"If yer tellin' us the bad first," Mr. Diggers chirped in a heckling voice, "the good must be even worse."

Perry turned to him with a courtesy undeserved, quite unruffled. "Sir," he said distinctly, "the good is so obvious that it does not require stating. I think every man of us knows what it is."

"Tarnation!" Mr. Diggers mumbled. "I don't."

"The chance to serve your nation, you swuddlin' fool," Moses Leet rasped. "This officer ain't no privateer mate, a-prattlin' about rum an wimmin an' loot."

"Aye," Perry said softly, "the chance to serve your nation. Gentlemen, that has been the motto of my life, and its meaning and its purpose. And yet I am, like yourselves, just a plain common citizen, happening to know how to serve my country with powder and ball rather than with adze and oakum iron. The leather apron and the woolen shirt is as honorable as this uniform and far more important."

Chid approved. He could see the cleverness of the man—not talking from a superior height or from behind the awesomeness of gold braid. He would make his point with ease, having sized up the situation and attacked it with understanding. Yet Chid could feel that Perry believed what he said; that his appeal to the patriotism in them was sincere and not merely a part of the shoddy show he had seen so often in this very room.

Perry told them, talking in conversational tones, about Mr. Eckford's shipbuilders who had gone to Sackett's Harbor. It was all that he could tell them about. Presque Isle, the site of the new naval construction yard, was unknown to him. Eckford had taken with him every able-bodied shipwright that could be spared from the big New York and southern yards. The tedious long journey had been made on foot northward from where one of Mr. Fulton's steamboats had landed them near Troy. Boston, hot bed of the "sesesh" talk of the Bay State, hadn't sent many of her shipbuilders. The Delaware and Maryland and Jersey towns were busy on naval building. There were few places left from which to recruit experienced shipbuilders save the remote coastal towns of Connecticut and Rhode Island. To enlist these men was his purpose; it was why he and Noah Brown both were here.

Chid was fascinated by the story of Sackett's Harbor. A worthy fleet had been built there, matching the tonnage and the hitting power of the British fleet of Ontario and keeping the lake open and the enemy at bay. Far to the westward the enemy had taken the Michigan lands, penetrating deeply to the southward and policing it with drunken and murderous Indians. They needed now but to open a secure line of communications through Lake Erie for an army of occupation to pour in from the sea, northward above Ontario, through Erie and into the Michigan lands. America then would be surrounded as the storm surf surrounded Block Island. Erie had to be closed to the British. It was America's last chance.

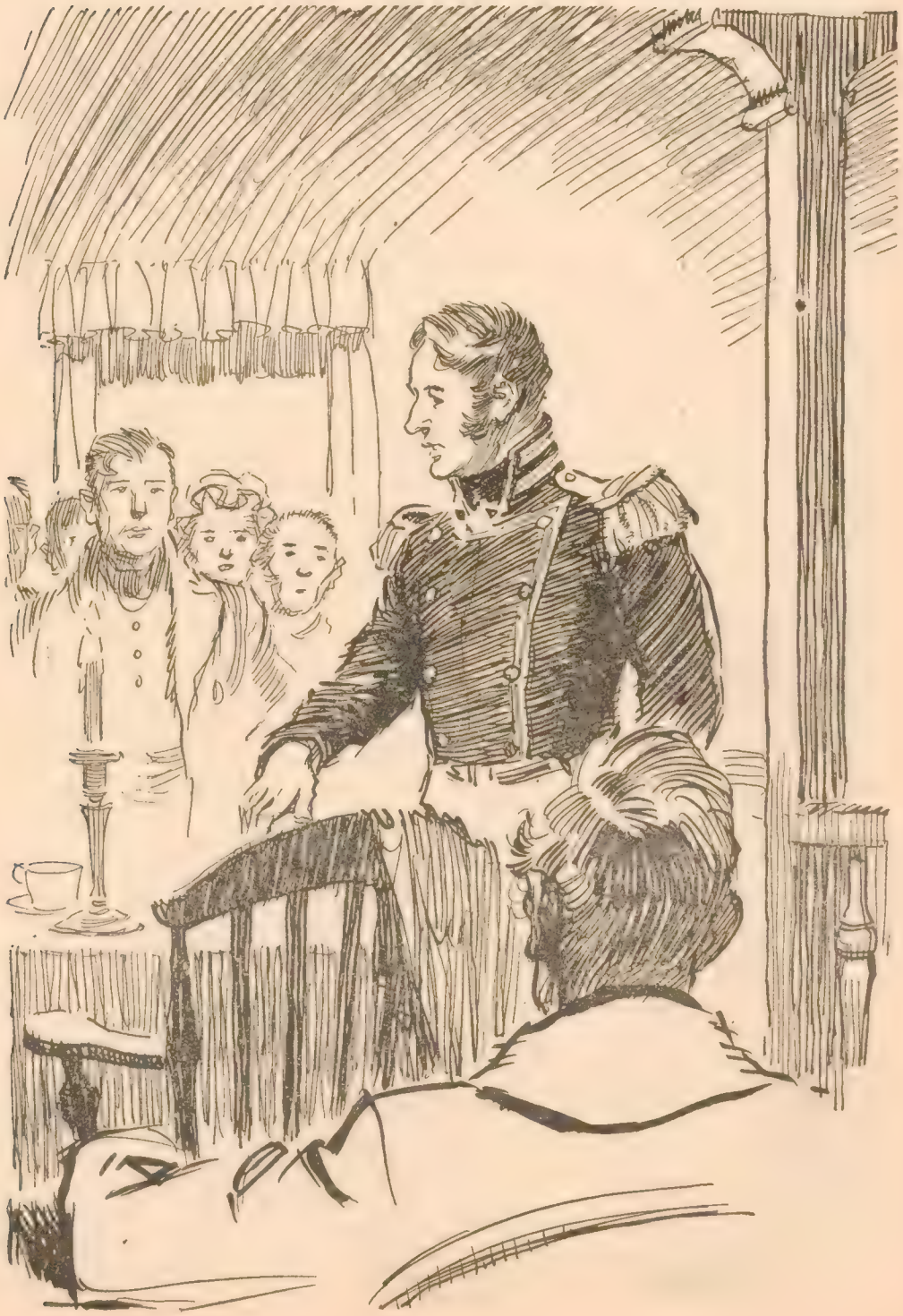
There was no fleet to close it. America's only heavy ship on Erie had been captured by the British, and the few small remaining gunboats were bottled up in the river Niagara behind the formidable guns of Britain's Fort Erie.

Commodore Chauncy, at Sackett's Harbor, could do no more than hold Ontario, matching adze stroke for adze stroke as he tried frantically to outbuild the British. He had early comprehended the Erie situation, and one day, just before the bitter winter storms closed the Indian trails of Northern York State, which were the only paths westward save the enemy-controlled lake itself, he had sent twenty of his precious shipwrights to the new yard. Their orders were to fell trees for the ships to be somehow built.

"THE pity of it was that he could send only a score," Perry told them. "Eight died —'Indians,' the others said when they finally staggered into Pittsburgh a fortnight ago. 'Indians with English muskets and the single purpose of burning the timber which was seasoning at Presque Isle.' Mr. Brown has seen these men.

"They're all as mad as a fresh brew, and are going back with him. I wish you could see those men. I think you'd get mad too, just hearing their story and seeing the cruelty that was practiced on them by the Indians. Mr. Brown would like to go with many more than those twelve, but I vow he'd go alone if he had to. How many Connecticut men are going, Mr. Brown?"

"I am pleased to address you as fellow Americans," Perry said, standing and as at ease as if he were talking to a single well-known friend.



"Five apprentices," Noah Brown said quietly, "so far."

"They'll come back heroes. Is that all?"

In spite of himself Chid felt the magnetism of Perry dissolving his natural caution. He recognized the talk as recruiting talk, rather cleverly veneered over, and instinct told him to be on guard. Yet that elusive something which Perry put into it as a man drew Chid, and he found himself wanting to believe.

"You goin' yourself?" Mr. Diggers inquired truculently.

"I am, sir," Perry replied, "as soon as I complete details at this end. Though I guess I'm something like the fisherman down Kingston way, over in Rhode Island State where I was born. He wanted my father to buy some fish. 'Bring 'em along,' said my father. 'Well,' said the man, 'as a matter of fact I haven't caught them yet.' I am to command the Erie fleet when I catch the ships."

The men laughed, appreciating the anecdote. It was their own language and understandable, and made Perry's presence among them a reasonable thing. It surprised Chid somewhat to see the interest.

Mr. Brown answered questions soberly and with forethought, not painting a rosy picture of shipbuilding in the remote wilderness he understood Presque Isle to be. Wages, he said, were high; nine dollars a week, with free barracks and food. Iron workers might ask ten dollars, and gunsmiths could ask what they wished. Transportation, too, Mr. Brown said, was free, but, as he reasonably pointed out, walking was free anywhere.

Moses Leet stood with tears in his eyes, suddenly shaking Mr. Brown's hand. "I don't know why I done it," he was saying. "Three days ago I put my tools away for good, sir. Last war I fit with steel blade an' musket ball. I reckon it never occurred to me a man could fight with his tools an' his bare hands. I reckon, sir, though, mebbe it's mostly a sort o' faith in a leader like him."

"Moses!" Chid said, scared. "What're you saying?"

"Why, I'm goin', boy," Moses said simply. Nobody ever gave us the sense o' it before. All they offered was liquor an' license. I swear, Chidsy, 'twas like the sweet sound o' a church bell to know that I was needed again an' could serve my country."

It scared Chid, an old man like Moses feeling the appeal of Perry too. After all the man hadn't promised a thing but hardship and reasonable wages. He hadn't even waved the flag very much.

Chid had heard about men like him: men who were followed blindly because of some quality of leadership that was indefinable, some faith that they instinctively built in men. Joshua Barney, the man who had fought the seventy-six sea war almost single-handed, was a man like that, according to Chid's own father. Men followed him wherever he went, demanding nothing but his leadership as an assurance of victory.

Chid could feel that way about Oliver Hazard Perry now. The man's simple straightforwardness and the quiet reverence in his voice when he spoke of America and duty and such contrasted sharply and brightly with the obfuscations which other men made of these simple things. Barney and he, Chid reckoned, were the same; men who took duty and unselfishness and sacrifice as privileges of life. His father had spoken often of the lofty things which Barney stood for in the years following the war. Curiously, now, there came to Chid the memory of Roswell Crown dying with his eyes on the ensign of that mean privateer and the strange holy light in them.

Chid was not to forget Perry. In a way he became a symbol for Chid too, representing something that he was to grasp but slowly. But presently Chid was concerned with only two of the matters mentioned by the soft voice: freedom and liberty. To Chid these were no profound matters nor did it occur to him that they ever could be. He wanted these things, for they were the means which alone would permit him to dream and plan and build. Nothing stood in the way but to hush that small new disturbing scruple and proceed with his plan.

CHAPTER V

THE *BLESSED CAUSE*

CHID edged toward the door, making the movement natural in the general circulation about the tap room. Mr. Brown had a few names on the paper; not many but more than Chid had expected to see there. His own name was the last in the list of apprentices. Moses Leet's was the first on the list of the volunteers. And, oddly, following Moses' name was that of Epaphras North, the graver who had so roundly cried that he'd go to no foreign soil. Mr. Perry hadn't even mentioned the nationality of Presque Isle—another proof, if a man pondered it, of the faith he had drawn.

Nez was mad, berating Chid. "Damn near two bells," he growled. "Chid, how many times you got to make up your mind? I thought that navy rooster had you hooked."

"He nearly did," Chid said soberly. "He kind of opened my eyes about a few matters. Nez, you certain that Cap Fish has a letter of marque, all regular?"

"All regular," Nez nodded. "Chid, you goin' churchy on me just when we're set for some prime fun?"

Chid did not answer. Beyond the post yard there was a queer reddish glow in the sky, like a faded berry stain on the snow curtain. It loomed in the storm as a rising moon is sometimes seen at sea, growing larger, yet having no definite shape.

"What do you make of it?" Chid asked.

Nez studied the glow, then shrugged. "Nuthin'," he said.

"It's fire, Nez, you know it's fire."

"Well, can't somethin' burn without gettin' fussed over it?" Nez said, and clutching Chid's arm, he hurried him along the footpath to the Tatum yard. "Chid, somebody'll spy it. We jest ain't got time to raise no alarm."

Chid broke away, running toward the glow. "It's Goudy's stables," he cried. "Old Beemis is in there, Nez. Hurry! He was drunk and bound to light his candle just to show he wasn't. Come on."

Mr. Halliday's post yard door opened, letting a patch of yellow light stab the storm. Then Tom gave the cry, "Fire! Fire! The stables is afire!" And Chid sprinted to join the men who poured from the tavern.

The fire, feeding on baled hay and ancient timbers, was a good one. Men were racing from the village now, and above their shouting and the shrieking of the trapped horses, the thin winter-hushed clang of the meeting-house bell pealed. The bucket brigade was forming in a ragged line, bridging the marches from the cove to the burning building.

"There's a man in there!" Chid yelled. "Old Beemis—and he's fool drunk!"

Chid dashed for the stable. He couldn't go near the leeward side at all. The red swirling flames swooped from out the cracked sash, licking the snow, driving him to the windward side. The lower floor was still untouched by fire, but, as Chid threw open the single-door, he could see the flames beginning to creep through some of the upper floor boards. There were other men beside him in the thick hay smoke; some going for the frantic horses. Chid reckoned that old Beemis would have crept into the hay to sleep off the rum. He climbed the loft ladder, missing steps in the hot gloom. Above him the heat was intense and the fire crackled and burned in the stored hay. Below, the horses cried like demons, fighting the pull of the halters and the bags which had been thrown over their heads.

Chid crawled on the floor, between flanking bales which were not yet fully ignited. The smoke was acrid and blinding, forcing him to breathe through his snow-soaked sleeve. He saw nothing of Beemis, nor was he sure for what to look. Behind him another man was climbing the ladder, groping toward him. Chid caught the flash of gold braid. It was Perry.

"Find that man?" he gasped.

"Nope, not yet. On a night like this he'd be sleeping to leeward sure."

"Good sense, boy. But that's where the fire is."

The flames were catching neighboring tinder now, like a man scattering field

fire to clear out varmints. There wasn't much time. Chid lay as flat as he could, inching toward the heart of the flames. Ahead of him, shielding him from the awful heat, a small grain tub moved. Perry was on his belly too, keeping the tub just ahead of Chid with a hay fork, pushing it each time Chid hitched forward.

Beemis lay between a burning bale and a low partition wall. The hay in which he had been sleeping was already burned and consumed. Chid couldn't tell about him. He didn't move, not even when Chid shook him roughly. He still reeked of rum.

"We'll have to drag him," Perry said and took a leg. "He smells hardly worth saving."

"He's an old man," Chid said. "He fought at Bennington last war. He was worth saving then."

"'Twas an unworthy remark," Perry said. "Out with him."

They tugged the bundle, dragging it to the traphole of the loft ladder. Burning brands fell about them, and Chid reckoned the roof was due to collapse any minute. Near the trap, an updraught of fresh cold air poured on them, driving the crisping heat away. Perry scuffed loose hay into a pad and sent it tumbling to the floor beneath the hole.

Beemis was a big man, too heavy for either to carry alone. But they each took one of his arms, hanging him like a drying bear hide, then let him drop to the hay-softened floor.

The entire building, fanned by a gust, suddenly burst into an ominous crackle, the flames first licking backward as if to take a sly taste of what was to follow. Chid and Perry followed their burden to the lower floor, now suffocating as a making-bake oven. Outside men yelled. Their buckets, reaching the line end but half filled, dashed ineffectually against the stable. Each breath that Chid took burned sharply, like a draught of the worst dunder taken with green-tail onion, a croup cure that was worse than the croup. Chid yelled, trying to bring some help, but he knew he wasn't making a sound.

"Ye'd better cut for it," Perry gasped. "Fetch some help. We can't make it alone."

CHID knew that. What strength he had left was scarcely enough to drag himself to the square red patch of stable door and the good cold outside.

"You go," Chid said, and he pushed Perry roughly toward the door. Then he lay flat, getting his breath and his sense, and when he felt the blackness leave him he tugged at Beemis.

He couldn't say why he had pushed Perry out, giving him the chance of escape. He'd never done anything like it before. Wildly, trying to move the bulk of old Beemis, he thought some nonsense about Perry's value. To the country, he supposed. But there wasn't any sense to it. He'd just done it; hadn't even thought about it before.

Chid had moved Beemis only a few inches when they found him. But Chid didn't remember those last minutes in the raging flames and awful choking smoke. He was suddenly in the night; the cold melting snow warm about his bare legs, and he was breathing bitter stinging air which cleared his brain. His trouser legs had smouldered away, and his great coat had been consumed to the length of a small sea jacket. Mr. Diggers was chumping handfuls of snow against the smouldering red cloth patches of his clothing, and some place below him, on his legs, there were cruel stabbing hurts.

Another bucket brigade had formed, leading to a hole chopped in the Boggtown Brook. "Set here, boy," said Mr. Diggers; "you'll feel some better bymbye. I got to tend bucket."

"Where's Captain Perry?"

"Over to Mr. Halliday's, singed slight, but he'll be all right," Mr. Diggers said. "He said he was all done in when you shoved him th'ough the door, boy; couldn't've breathed another blessed secunt. You'll have a fast friend at that there shipyard o' his'n."

Mr. Diggers legged it. Chid could see the bundle that was Beemis lying blackly in the snow and partly sunk into it, like a currant in dough. It was alone, away from the crowd which surrounded

the doomed stable. He felt better now, and he suddenly felt the cold, a thing which he had thought he'd never mind again. A figure came to the bundle, spread a blanket, and rolled Beemis into it; then came to Chid. It was Nez, oddly furtive.

"You be all right, Chid?" Nez whispered. "Look, you feel good enough to tote?"

"Tote what?"

"Beemis," said Nez. "He's nigh done in, but he'll live to pay for this yet."

"Who'll bother Beem?"

"Judge Goudy will," Nez said. "He's that sore 'bout his stable burnin', Chid, an' he swears to have Beem in the choky for life. Beem is kind o' related to me, Chid, somewhere's in our damn fambly. I mean to spook him away. You kind o' owe me help, Chid."

Chid said he'd lend a hand. They tied the paired blanket corners together, using reef knots, then took the loop, one at each end, and carried and slid Beemis over the snow. The bucket brigade was going full blast, chanting as the buckets passed along the long line, and making noisy splashing work of it. Mr. Halliday's Tom stood near the hot fire end to take orders for thirst killers. Nobody noticed Chid and Nez. Beemis was heavy, in the same way a sack of grain is heavy, and Chid was puffing in no time.

"Is he hurt much, Nez?"

"I ain't looked hard," Nez replied. "Burned a mite, but I reckon he don't feel nothin'. Beem was prepared, Chid. A man's smart to keep a certain amount of liquor in him in case he meets up with accidents. It dulls the pain o' them. But I don't cal'ate to have him wake up in no donjon, an' discover hisself in misery with no chance to get easement for it. Like I said, he's related."

Nez was in the lead, guiding Chid down the river path. The snow had fined slightly under a sharper wind turned to the east of north. It stung as it beat down on Chid. The stable still burned ruddily beyond the tall dry marsh weeds in which they walked, and Chid knew it was a goner. At the Tatum yard Nez turned, skirting the fence toward the river.

"Where we taking him, Nez?"

"Onto the *Blessed Cause*," Nez said without turning. "Ain't no safer place for Beem than to sea."

Chid agreed. Poor Beemis, with his reputation about town, would be hunted down like a sheep-killing dog. Judge Goudy had warned Beem often enough in his court. Beemis, this time, had destroyed property in his drunkenness, and, to save his face, the judge would have to commit him as a proven public enemy.

THE *Blessed Cause* was beside the Tatum east-wharf, her stern lines reaching off into the rolling river and her starboard bow snuggled against the piles. Flares moved on her deck. Snow was being pushed overside through the freeing ports by men with board drags, and high aloft, unseen in the black sky, unsheeted canvas rustled harshly. Chid knew that the schooner was preparing to sail.

"It's way past nine," Chid said. "You said nine sharp."

"Cap's been waitin'. For me an' you."

Chid said nothing. He was doing, at last, what his sense and reason told him was smart and profitable. But that odd something, like a slight belly pain, was telling him something too. Chid, actually on the schooner, had no trouble forgetting the pain.

They laid Beemis on a hatch cover, snow-cleared and already battened down for sea. Nez, oddly, paid Beemis no more attention. "Chid," he said, "I want for you to meet up with Cap Fish. Step below. Cap's waitin' an' anxious."

"You better take care of Beem."

"Beem's all right. Step below, Chid."

Chid dropped down the ladder, feeling with relish the absence of the bitter wind. He stood in a small alcove from which opened several low doors, evidently to cabins. One opening, into a passage, led forward to a small man-filled space. Nez opened the after door without knocking, pushing Chid before him.

"Well, Cap," Nez said, "this here is Chid Alwyn to last."

Chid saw before him a small wizened

man, clean shaven and bald-headed. He sat in a winged fireside chair, oddly out of place in the small cluttered cabin, and seemed hardly to half fill it. His feet reached the floor only because he kept his toes pointed downward. Chid noticed the eyes most. They were a sharp inquisitive gray, shrewd and cruel, and capable of outstaring a timid man. Chid thought him a good man to make money and probably fair, becoming hard and cruel only if he had to.

"Your serv't," Chid said, looking him straight in the eyes.

Captain Preserved Fish held Chid's eyes for a long searching moment. Then he stood up, as small a man as Chid had ever seen. But there was nothing about him to make Chid laugh. "I don't want servants," the captain said. "I want men who can fight and who I can count on, win, lose, or draw. You'd naturally have a question to ask. I'm prepared to answer before we talk articles, Alwyn."

"A-yep," Chid said, "it's fair burning me. What in blazes are you and Nez Nott so all-fired set on shipping me for? I'm only a carpenter."

"That's the right question," Fish said and sat down, seemingly pleased. "Well, first we need carpenters. There's but Nott and Antwine Somethingorother. The right kind of carpenters is as essential as gunners, times. Some of the boys don't hold with me on that, but I've been out on a Letter before and I know. Second, Alwyn, Nott states that you're dead set on some prize money. That's the kind of talent I want. It's better than notions about patriotism and a hate for the British for assuring me the loyalty I need in this business. Question answered?"

"A-yep," said Chid, "answered good."

"Say 'sir'," Fish said sharply.

"When I'm signed on, it will be sir," Chid said.

"Chid, you better sign," Nez said. "I been to a heap o' bother to fetch you away from that charmer Perry."

Chid wondered how he had managed to veer so far from his purposes these last hours. First it had been Noah Brown, talking a sort of sober sense; then Captain Perry, stirring emotions Chid hadn't suspected owning. Standing before Captain Fish, Chid had the conviction that at last he had caught up with something that he had been aiming at for a long time.

Fish opened a page of his log and dipped a quill, offering it to Chid. Chid scanned the page-head above the listed names.

—for three months or until a major prize has been taken at no wage but a share in all prizes, duly adjudged, valued and condemned by a prize Court of the United States of America, as by law provided, in that part set down following each name, said part being the proper part of the sum remaining after the lay of the owners and of Preserved Fish, Master, has been subtracted, by common calculation, from the whole . . .

"What's the lay?" Chid asked.

"One thirty-second."

"With only three carpenter rates?" Chid said. "Seems if, a man might be worth more."

"One thirty-second," Fish said, his eyes steely.

Chid took the quill. Sometimes, trading, you met a man as smart as you were, or a little smarter, and it took a good head to know when to quit milking.

"I reckon you ought to know I'm bound out," Chid said. "I'm running out on my papers."

"You ever murder anyone?"

"Nope."

"Well, sign then," the captain said, amused. "Privateers ain't fussy so long's a man's still breathing."

CHID wrote his name, clumsily because he didn't often have occasion to use the quill. Fish carefully wrote "1/32" after it, then, scanning the list, crossed four names through with the quill.

"Hail down the mate."

"The mate. . . ?"

"Aye—Mister Tinker," Fish growled. "He's likely on deck. Lively, boy!"

"Yes, sir," Chid said, and climbed the companion ladder.

Mr. Tinker, in a great coat which reached to his feet, was superintending

the last of the deck work under the flares. Snow-bound sheets and halyards were being freed, and warm water from the galley fire was being poured over all the lower blocks to free them of ice. Mr. Tinker went below immediately Chid spoke to him, saying nothing.

A moment later, from the quarterdeck, his pipe shrilled, like a banshee in the storm, and the cry of "All hands!" went over the schooner in a rippling wave. Men came from the watch below; and from dark places above the deck. Chid guessed there were thirty-five in the ragged line they formed along the weather bulwark, spaced between the tarpaulin-covered guns now lashed inboard behind closed ports. Chid, finding Nez, stood with him and an onion-smelling man, in queer logger's leather stockings, obviously a pea-souper. Mr. Tinker called the roll, from the log.

"All present, sir," Tinker said when he'd called the last name, which was Chid's. "I'd say we're ready to sail."

The captain whispered to Mr. Tinker, who touched his forelock and again faced forward.

"Barns, Mennenger, Clark, and that bastid you call O'Dowd," he called. "Captain orders ye aft. Lively, now!"

The four men slouched aft, not very willingly. Chid saw then that Captain Fish had brought a large pistol from under the folds of his coat. Mr. Tinker had taken up a gunwad screw in his hand, its hooked and twisted point gleaming cruelly in the flare light, and behind them six musketeers had lined themselves.

Fish looked without emotion on the four hands who toed the edge of the quarterdeck break.

"Get off the ship," he intoned flatly.

Mr. Tinker made a stirring motion. It awakened the men from their dumbfounded staring. One of them, hands outspread, took a step toward the captain, but Fish's gun was pressing his chest before the step was completed.

"Get off," Fish said with a curious snarl, "and never mind your chests. You'd have sent us off in the boats on colder seas than this without our possibles, we hadn't found you out. Get ashore."

The men filed over the brow and into the shore shadows.

"If you see a head, shoot it, Mr. Tinker," the captain said, "and any more, they go the same way. But you might mention that there won't be land so handy. Get her under plain sail, Mr. Tinker—a prime night to slip to sea."

Chid wasn't of much use in the ensuing activity. It was a job for seamen. Immediately the staysail and storm trysail on the main were set. Hawsers came in wet and stiff, the sails were sheeted in and the schooner ghosted away from the wharf under press of the tide and the gale in her almost naked spars. About all Chid did was to throw the flares overboard when Mr. Tinker spoke from the darkness of the quarterdeck.

"Home the heads'l," Mr. Tinker called. "Helm up, man! Way up and meet her."

The bow of the *Blessed Cause* fell away from the land, and the wind passed over the stern, filling the storm sails with a muffled crack that sent snow and thin ice shapes showering to the deck. With gathering speed the black schooner bucked the river drift ice seaward.

Chid, shivering in the waist, which was deep with frozen uncoiled line, found Nez. Nez was cutting a chew to drive off the seasickness which he feared more than enemy action, a navy topman having recommended tobacco as the only stave-off.

"How's Beem?"

Nez chumped his chew, softening it.

"Beem's dead," he said after a while. "We'll have to scuttle him at sea, I reckon. He was dead when we brung him on board, Chid."

Chid shivered, not from the cold. It was curious. Old Beemis himself had recommended rum for just such an occasion not four hours ago.

"I HAD to get you here," Nez said. "I jest had to after that Perry made himself a real hero for you. I was scairt I couldn't, for Perry, over in Halliday's, was hollerin' for you. Totin' Beem was the first thing I struck onto. This ship had to have you, Chid. Them four hands the captain beat ashore was plannin' to take the schooner and sail her on

the account once Fish had 'em through the navy patrol. Cap, he got onto 'em, but he didn't know how many to maroon till he was certain o' you. Three of 'em were carpenters, you see. He needed you bad."

"There must be more."

" 'Course. But Cap reckons like they're scairt yaller. It's why he had to be sure o' you, an' you see you was almighty important, Chid. But I never did 'spect I'd have to spook you to what you always wanted to do, I never did. Chid, you ain't sore, are you?"

"Nope," Chid said, meaning it. "I figure you did me a favor, sort of. That damn recruiting kind of got me this time. But, blame it, Nez, I wished I'd known. I'd never have settled for only a thirty-second lay."

Nez spit expertly and grinned. "Chid," he said, "you're the one-thinkin'est man I ever met up with. Don't you lay store by nuthin' but money?"

The *Blessed Cause* was off the untidy wharves of Noank, making fast going of it, so close that a good spitter could make the shore easy. A militia sentry fire gleamed on the point, like a baleful red eye winking in the snow gusts. Abreast of it the schooner was hailed by trumpet. "What ship is that out there?"

"*Blessed Cause,*" Mr. Tinker shouted across the dark channel. "Whyn't you be that concerned 'bout your damned Noank smugglers when you spy 'em?"

"Where you bound?"

"Where you Noankers ain't got the guts to go."

"Hunh! What cargo?"

"Cargo!" Mr. Tinker boomed, "Why, preserved fish, you goddamn by-product!"

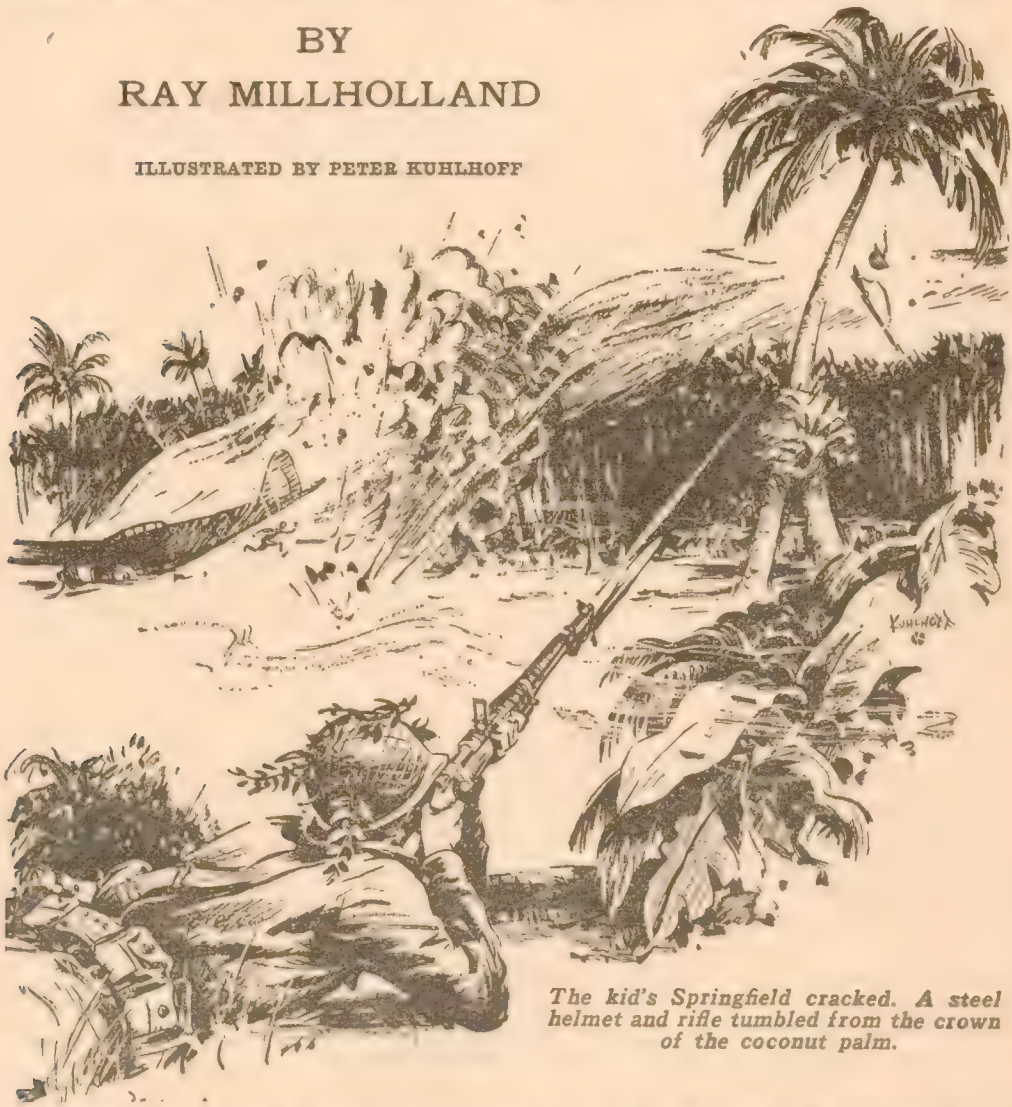
Chid joined in the hilarity of the watch on deck. Nez roared, clapping him hard on the back. It was a good start, off to sea with the ring of laughter on deck; a happy ship, the pea-souper named them. Chid, dropping below, hoped it would be a lucky ship too.

SHOT FOR SHOT

BY

RAY MILLHOLLAND

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF



The kid's Springfield cracked. A steel helmet and rifle tumbled from the crown of the coconut palm.

THE rhythm of the transport's propulsion machinery slackened perceptibly. The fifteen hundred marines below decks in full landing-party gear sat with their backs to the steel bulkheads, their rifles held vertically between their knees. In an hour—two at the most—they would be swarming down rope nets and into the invasion barges.

Private Deal loosely clasped the forestock of his Springfield rifle in his young calloused hands. Every five minutes or so, since the "stand by" order at dawn, he had flipped up his rear sight leaf and blown sharply through the rear sight aperture, to clear it of an imaginary speck of lint. Bad business having to take a quick sight on a Jap and finding your target all blurred for dirt clogging the hole in your rear sight aperture. Even on the rifle range, with nobody shooting back at you, a little speck of dirt could raise hell with a man's score.

The marine squatting next to Private Deal kept biting short pieces from the

end of a burnt match and blowing them out onto the deck. The man chewed up his match right down to the charred part, until the corner of his mouth which Private Deal could see became smeared with black.

The marine was an old guy—twenty-five, anyway. He caught Private Deal watching him chew on that match and said, "This your first time, kid?"

"Yeah," said Private Deal.

The older man chewed up the rest of the match and blew it all out. "Listen, kid, you stick with me when the shooting starts. I'm a bay'net fighter, see? I'll take care of any damn' yellow belly pulling a snake act through the jungle on us."

Private Deal dried the sweating palm of first one hand then the other on his knee and shook his head. "You better team up with somebody else, Magurth. I'm lousy at bayonet work." He gripped his rifle until the tendons showed white under his knuckles. "I'll take my chances out in the open. Give me a couple of hundred yards between my front sight and—"

"Just my idea exactly," nodded Magurth reassuringly. "You knock the snipers outta the palm trees and I'll stick the ones that get too close. And don't worry, kid, about Magurth missing, once a yellow belly gets within reach of this bay'net."

"O.K., I'll knock 'em out of the trees and you gut 'em," said Private Deal, pretending to be tough and casual about the whole business. Actually, he wanted to grab Magurth's arm and hang to him until the older man had repeated it all over again—that offer to do the bayonet work for both of them. Magurth was good with a bayonet. Even in practice, when there was no chance of his hurting you more than a hard poke in the belly, the way Magurth snarled when he lunged through your guard gave you cold cramps.

Magurth was a better bayonet fighter than Sergeant Keegan; and that was saying something. In fact, he was better than Lieutenant Bradshell, who was regimental instructor in bayonet fighting. But then a second-hitch marine doesn't go around making a monkey out of as touchy a commissioned officer as Lieutenant Bradshell was.

This Bradshell also held the advance base obstacle course record by a full ten seconds. And when he finished you could hardly see a hair out of place, while the next man to finish, looking like he'd been through a train wreck, collapsed at the finish line. Same thing with the way he could handle a Colt .45 pistol and a submachine gun. He had the whole detachment lashed to a mast and high seas breaking over the way he could throw lead with those self-pumpers.

AND up until the time this kid Private Deal, fresh out of Parris Island in a replacement draft, hit the rifle range of the advance base, somewhere down in the South Pacific, Lieutenant Bradshell was top dog with the special fighting tool of the Marines, the old reliable .30-'06 Springfield. Before the kid drew his first quinine ration he was out on the rifle range and giving Bradshell a real battle to retain his detachment championship with the Springfield.

All tied they were when the rookie and the hard-nosed lieutenant finished the regulation Expert's Course, six points ahead of the rest of the field. Major Clark was getting a private chuckle out of the way the kid had Bradshell in the sweat box. He ordered the tie shot off at 1,000 yards. Twenty shots in the string, and wartime ammunition, remember, not the hand-loaded Camp Perry stuff Bradshell had lugged clear from the States in his foot locker just for an occasion like this.

When three points behind, on their thirteenth shots, the kid got his first lucky break in the shoot-off. Bradshell waited for the mirage to quit boiling and eased off his fourteenth. Nice hold, nice trigger squeeze and everything. But he didn't knock his target down—meaning that down in the pits they didn't hear the snap of his bullet going through the paper target pasted on the canvas-covered frame.

Maybe two seconds, and still the pit detail didn't douse Lieutenant Bradshell's target. Major Clark was on the firing-line end of the field telephone

and was about to jack up the pit detail when Bradshell rolled over on his left side and held up the empty cartridge brass he had just shucked out of his rifle.

"Range officer!" he sings out. "Alibi on Number 8 target. Defective round of ammunition."

This kid Private Deal never even looked up. He squeezed off his fourteenth shot. The pit detail doused his target smartly and had it up again—

"Private Deal's fifteenth shot for record is a V-Five!" announced his scorer. Meaning, he had clicked for a pinwheel bull's eye.

Meanwhile the range officer walked over to where Lieutenant Bradshell was holding up the empty cartridge case he claimed was defective and took a gander at it. He looked at the base to see how much the primer had been flattened against the bolt head and shook his head.

"Sorry, Lieutenant, but I can't allow you an alibi on this. The primer has been flattened by a full powder charge."

Bradshell turned red up his neck and past his ears and gathered up a handfull of empties, turning them all so their flattened primers showed.

"Look at the way every tool mark of the bolt head is embossed in these primers. Now look at this one I claim an alibi for. You can't see a single tool mark."

Just then Major Clark hung up his field telephone hand piece and called out: "Lieutenant Bradshell's last shot is scored a miss! Resume firing!" and then winked up at his adjutant.

"Aye, aye, sir," gritted Bradshell through his teeth, and rolled back into firing position.

No, he didn't blow up and throw his last five shots any place they took a notion to travel. He took his full time allowance for every shot. He got a snowball—meaning a bull's eye on his next shot.

The kid got fooled by the mirage that was making his target squirm like a quart of angle worms. His front sight got lost in the black and barely got him a four at "twelve o'clock." Another inch higher and he would have dropped to a three and then they both would have been all tied again, with Bradshell the odds-on favorite because he was getting better with every shot.

BUT so was the kid. Maybe it was beginner's luck, and maybe again it was partly the training he had gotten from the ex-marine drill master at the State Soldiers and Sailors Orphan's Home. You see the kid's old man never was just exactly right in the head after coming back from France, in '18, with a couple of square inches of silver plate in his skull. When the kid was just turned nine his old man went clear bats and shot himself with the German Luger pistol he sneaked back from France in his pack.

Anyway, the kid was a natural rifle shot when he shipped with the marines on his nineteenth birthday. Only he had developed a bad habit, somewhere along the line, of trying to shoot from his left shoulder—aiming with his left

NEW SUCCESS OVER ATHLETE'S FOOT

NEW SCIENTIFIC 2-WAY TREATMENT WITH **QUINSANA** POWDER -ON FEET AND IN SHOES – IS PRODUCING AMAZING RESULTS. IN TESTS ON THOUSANDS OF PERSONS, PRACTICALLY ALL CASES OF ATHLETE'S FOOT CLEARED UP IN A SHORT TIME.

eye, whenever he wanted extra special to hit what he was aiming at. Naturally, he did not get much chance to shoot from his port side when a tough old marine rifle instructor had him under his eye on the rifle range. But—

Well, the kid grooved his nineteenth shot for a bull, in his match with Lieutenant Bradshell; and doing it regulation, taking the slam of his rifle butt against his right shoulder like he didn't know there was any other way of holding it.

The kid grooved his nineteenth shot for a bull in his match with Bradshell.

The lieutenant knocked down his target for a five, on his nineteenth shot, too. But he was still trailing the kid by one point. Take any game you pick and one point makes a bum out of a champion or a champ out of a bum, whichever way the break falls.

The pressure was all on the kid, naturally. He hiked his sling strap up his left arm and clamped his jaw against the comb of his rifle. This was the pay-off shot, and he knew every enlisted man in the detachment was pulling his left ear for luck and putting on body English for him to pinwheel his last shot and rub Bradshell's nose in what he wasn't used to taking.

Whang goes Bradshell's last shot for another bull's eye. The muzzle blast from it kicked up a puff of dust, and the cross wind carried it right down into the kid's face. He got some of it in his nose. Lucky, when he sneezed, he still had his trigger finger flat along the stock or he'd have blown his last shot.

The kid wiped the sweat from his right eye on the shoulder of his shirt and took another sight.

"Private Deal has one minute and forty seconds to fire his last shot," said the range officer, keeping his eye on the sweep-second hand of his strap watch.

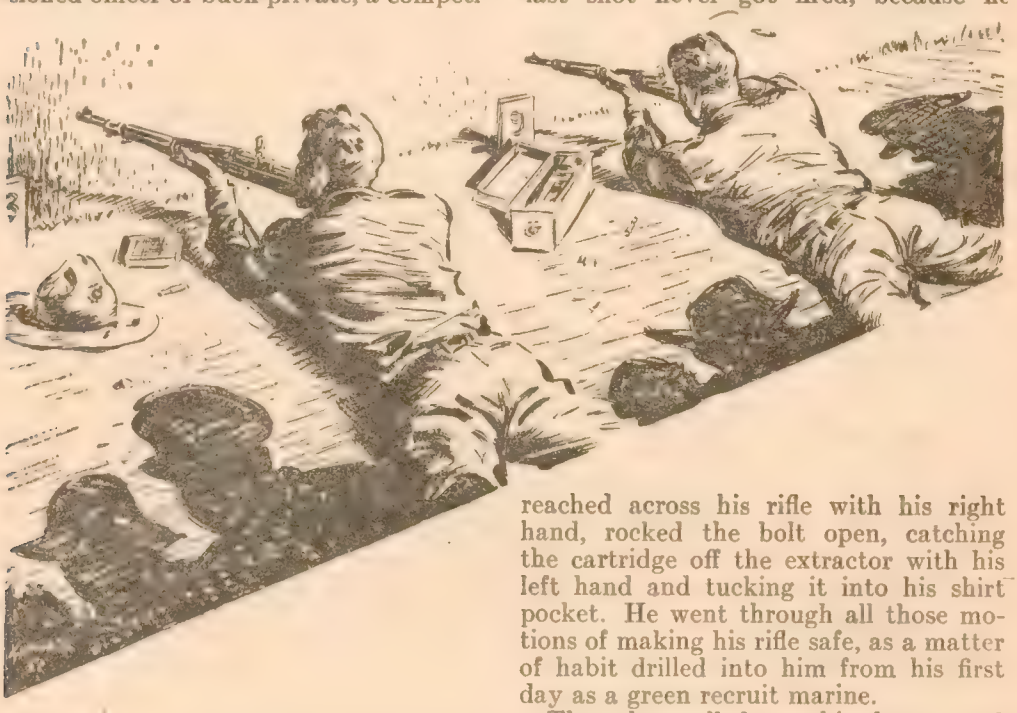
All this wasn't helping the kid to get off that last shot of his. Besides, it wasn't sweat blurring his right eye; it was a speck of grit kicked up by the muzzle blast of Bradshell's last shot. The more he rubbed his eye, the more it watered.

By that time there was no chance of seeing the bull's eye through the aperture of his rear sight with that eye. So what does the kid do but give his legs a flop to the right, switch the sling strap to his right arm and settle down with a

deep breath, to fire his last shot from his port shoulder!

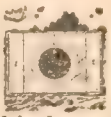
The range officer took one look at the kid flattened out on the ground, wrong-swivelled, you might say, to regulation, and started to say something about it. But Major Clark gave him a hard thumb in the ribs. "Pipe down, Fields. By the Old Harry, I'll make a corporal out of that lad if he grooves this one."

If Lieutenant Bradshell had noticed the kid switching his legs, he didn't show it. Bradshell closed his fancy spotting telescope, and started backing away from the firing point and picking up his empty brass cartridge cases. Commissioned officer or buck private, a competitor in a rifle match picks up his own brass and leaves his firing point clean.



Back steps Bradshell, never looking behind him to make sure he wasn't going to step on Private Deal's right leg that was now directly in his road since the kid had switched his shooting position.

Well, it happened. Just as the kid tucked his left index finger inside the trigger guard and was taking up slack on the trigger, Bradshell's heel came down on the kid's right ankle.



NOBODY, of course, could say it was intentional on Bradshell's part. First, the kid had switched position so his legs, which had been clear of Bradshell's firing area, were now spread out into it. Second, Bradshell was backing up all stooped over picking up his empty brass and technically had a right to expect the kid would keep his legs over in his own country where they belonged.

But that didn't save the kid from feeling something snap down in his ankle and a hot streak of pain shoot up his right leg. At the same time, his left finger went limp on the trigger and his last shot never got fired, because he reached across his rifle with his right hand, rocked the bolt open, catching the cartridge off the extractor with his left hand and tucking it into his shirt pocket. He went through all those motions of making his rifle safe, as a matter of habit drilled into him from his first day as a green recruit marine.

Then he pulled up his knees and lowered his forehead on his arms and gritted his teeth, the pain in his right ankle was that bad.

Major Clark saw the whole thing happen, and said, "No contest! This match will be fired over at the first opportunity. Sergeant Keegan, have a couple of your men help young Deal to the sick bay."

Lieutenant Bradshell delivered his best quarter deck salute. "With the major's permission, I concede the match to Private Deal. I had no business barging

astern without looking where I was going, sir."

The major slammed the salute right back "Very sportsmanlike for you to suggest it, Mr. Bradshell."

Quick as that, the kid blurts out, "I don't want a gutter lilly, sir. Let the lieutenant and me shoot this off tomorrow."

"Very good, tomorrow then," said the major and turned away abruptly, to keep anybody from seeing the twinkle of approval in his eye.

But even majors can have their orders countermanded by higher authority. Hardly had the surgeon diagnosed the swelling on Private Deal's right ankle as nothing more than a bruised tendon, needing only a figure-eight bandage to put the patient back on his feet, than the order came to roll packs and stand by to board a large camouflaged transport which had slipped into the harbor under the escort of two destroyers.

Sergeant Keegan mustered his platoon and began calling out the names of men on the sick list:

"Private Calkins!"

"Here!"

"Fall out and report with your pack to the base hospital convalescent detail. That appendicitis scar of yours is too green for the tough going this outfit is heading for."

"But, Sergeant, I can make it—"

"Shove off for the base hospital, Calkins!"

Three more men not in absolutely perfect physical condition were ordered to fall out and report to the base hospital. The sergeant folded his list and tucked it into his breast pocket and proceeded down the line, to give each man's weapons and equipment a last searching inspection.

When he came to Private Deal he stopped short.

"Hell, I thought they had you flat on your back with a busted ankle or something."

Private Deal, who was taking most of his weight on his sound left ankle, looked his sergeant straight in the eye.

"They painted it with iodine and marked me Duty," he lied blandly.

"If you wasn't such a damn' good shot, I'd call you the liar you are," said Sergeant Keegan.

"Honest, Sergeant—"

SERGEANT KEEGAN glowered at Private Deal's ankle bandage showing above the top of his shoe. He lifted stern eyes to the kid's pleading look. "You'll probably knock off a couple of yellow bellies before they slam a bayonet into you. Button that left pocket flap of your shirt, marine!"

It went clear over the kid's head that, in the eleven months and twenty-three days he'd been in the Corps, this was the first time a veteran non-com like Sergeant Keegan had called him a marine to his face. But then he would have stood for being called pretty much anything just so long as he stayed with the platoon.

His fingers were clumsy when he tried to button his shirt pocket. He had to run his thumb down inside of it and straighten that live caliber .30 Springfield cartridge he had put there on the rifle range—that twentieth shot he had never fired because Lieutenant Bradshell had stepped on his ankle.

He got a queer feeling, right then, while he was thinking about Bradshell and how he'd showed himself as a real sport in front of the whole detachment —when who should turn up to give the platoon another inspection before boarding the transport but Lieutenant Bradshell himself.

"Attention!" barks Sergeant Keegan, and everybody including Private Deal pulls in his chin and lines his eyes on the dead level for the horizon straight ahead.

Down the line came the lieutenant, inspecting every man's rifle and checking his cartridge belt to make sure every pocket held two clips. He practically tore the ears off Number Four of the first squad because he had plugged the muzzle of his rifle with a greased rag.

"There's less messy ways of getting killed than having the bolt of your rifle blow back and scatter your brains all over your shirt, Anderson."

When it came the kid's turn to be inspected by Bradshell, he snapped his rifle to port arms and opened the bolt.

But Bradshell did not snatch it away from him like he had done with the other men. Instead he took a sharp look at the kid and said, "Next time I try to put you in the hospital, Deal, I'll have to borrow a tank, it looks like."

What he meant, of course, was that the kid was all whale-bone and rawhide —stuff a real marine is made of. Any other man in the platoon, including Sergeant Keegan, would have traded his next forty-eight-hour shore leave to be joshed like that by an officer. As far as the others went, Lieutenant Bradshell was apologizing to the kid, plain as if he had got down on his knees and licked the dust off the kid's shoes. But from the pain and all in his right ankle, Private Deal just stared at the buckle of the lieutenant's helmet strap and said nothing.

All that happened two days before the kid and Magurth made that trade between them in the passageway of the transport—about Magurth doing the bayonet fighting and the kid doing the long range rifle shooting for the two of them.

Those two days below decks on the transport weren't spent just sitting around and waiting for the next call to chow. Sergeant Keegan pasted a map of an enemy airport on a bulkhead and hammered into every man's head just what his assignment was to be after the platoon hit the beach.

"IT'S our job to punch right through and get to the other side of the airport before the enemy gets time to organize his defences. Jump, fly, or belly-crawl —but get there and get there fast! Pick off the pilot of every Jap plane that tries to take off or comes in to rearm. Between times, you can knock off any of the ground crew that get curious about what you're up to."

But all that was behind the kid now. He sat there, resting his pack against the bulkhead and waiting with Magurth for the loud speaker at the end of the passageway to blare out the order: "Landing party away!"

Magurth, the man who liked fighting with naked steel, ran his thumbs under his pack straps and shifted his feet, prepared to arise at a moment's notice.

"You'll soon be knowing, kid, how it feels to kill a man."

"Yeah, it won't be long, I guess," Private Deal said.

Sergeant Keegan, following, halted in front of the kid and said, "Let's have a gander at your game ankle, Deal." He gripped the bandaged ankle with his left hand while the right rotated the toe of the kid's right shoe. "That hurt any?"

The kid blew an imaginary speck out of his rear-sight aperture.

Sweat poured down the kid's face like he had been doused with a bucket of sea water.

"No," said the kid through his clenched teeth.

The sergeant let go of the kid's foot and said, "This is your last chance to get on the sick list. 'Fact, I've got a good notion—"

"Lay off the kid," snarled Magurth. "He's my shipmate, see? I'll pack him on my back if his dog gives out."

Sergeant Keegan stabbed a look at Magurth. "Don't report back after the show without him, Magurth, because you'll be one marine that's expendable on my books."

"Landing party away!" rang the command over the loud speaker through every compartment of the troop ship. The platoon moved at a shuffling trot through the long, stifling, dimly-lit passageway and up the companionway ladders to the spar deck. There in the gray murk of tropical dawn, they went over the side and down the heavy rope nets, dropping by threes and fives into the landing barges.

The first barge to shove off and head for the vague shadow of silent shoreline was that of the kid's platoon. As they drew nearer, a strip of white coral sand loomed ahead; and behind that, a low barrier of green, spiked with tall coconut palms.

"Remember, we bust straight on through to the airport," warned Sergeant Keegan. "Then straight across the landing strip to the other side. No shooting until we get there. Then crack down on anything you see move. . . . Lieutenant Bradshell will be supporting our left with two machine-gun squads; so don't worry about getting flanked. Let's go!"

The landing barge crunched to a dead stop on the beach. The platoon piled out, rifles held high as the slow groundswell broke around their hips. In another moment Private Deal, with Magurth a pace or so on his left, was sprinting for the green wall of vegetation that marked the beach margin. The soft coral sand was merciful to his bandaged ankle.

Suddenly, Magurth swept the kid almost off balance and with the same movement of his gorilla-like arms lunged downward into a shallow trench in the sand. There was a gurgling grunt, and Magurth's bayonet came up stained with crimson.

"What a soldier gets for sleeping at his post, kid," he commented.

They smashed on through the fifty-yard strip of vegetation and out onto the hard surface of an airplane landing strip. To their right and left other members of their platoon were racing headlong for the farther side of the airport.

"Shake a leg, kid," Magurth snarled back over his shoulder. "This ain't no place to pick daisies."

Private Deal gritted his teeth and lengthened his stride. Every time his right heel hit the hard-packed earth a flame of pain seared up his ankle and through his body. Magurth had to turn at the far edge of the air field and race back, to grab the kid's right arm and whip it over a brawny shoulder. Magurth literally carried him like a sack of grain to the edge of the vegetation before he let go.

"DUCK! Here comes their dawn patrol plane in from the west." Magurth rammed the kid flat on the ground. "Grab some of this green stuff and cover your head."

The Jap patrol came in barely palm-tree high, landing flaps down and motor throttled.

"Is that guy blind?" exclaimed the kid in amazement. "All he's got to do is look straight ahead and he can't help seeing our transport."

"Sure he's blind—from the rising sun," Magurth jerked over his shoulder. "He's been staring straight into it for the last fifty miles on the way in. See? He's having trouble with black spots in his eyes coming in for a landing. . . . Look at him trying to land that thing when his plane is twenty feet off the ground yet."

An inviting target flying within fifty yards of his front sight was too much of a temptation for the kid to resist. Squatted, with both elbows resting on his knees, he picked up the head and shoulders of the pilot with his front sight and fired.

"Smack in the ear," gloated Magurth approvingly. "I seen pieces of his ear phone fly."

The plane flew on for a matter of fifty yards; then suddenly dived sharply toward the ground, bounded high in the air, crashing wheels up, and burst into flame. The kid shucked a fresh cartridge into his rifle and blew an imaginary speck out of his rearsight aperture. He felt quite pleased with his marksmanship.

Then Magurth said, "You've done a favor for them yellow bellies not even their own pilot could. Now they know damn' well the marines have landed."

The wail of a siren on the roof of a portable repair shed rose above the hungry crackling of flames enveloping the patrol plane. Then directly across the field from them a Jap ground crew peeled back the camouflage from a dive bomber and trundled it out into the field while its pilot made repeated efforts to get his motor started.

"Two hundred—no, two-fifty," said the kid, talking aloud to himself as he set his rear sight.

The pilot had ceased trying to get his motor started and was standing up in the cockpit, screaming shrill commands and pointing to a mass of camouflage netting entangling his propeller.

The kid's finger closed smoothly on his trigger.

"Smack in the guts. I seen the dust fly from his crummy shirt," approved Magurth. "Kid, this is better'n a front row seat at a strip-tease show, watching you work."

One of the plane's ground crew sprang up on the wing and tried to hoist out the limp body of the pilot. The kid nailed him through the head, jamming a second body in the cockpit.

Magurth gathered his knees under him, rifle at trail in his left hand and a grenade in his right fist.

"Cover me, kid. I'm going to finish that Jap kite for keeps."

It seemed so ridiculously matter of fact the way Magurth did it. Apparently none of the ground crew were armed with anything but automatic pistols which they squibbed off with no attempt to deliberate aim and then dived back into the bush.

The kid managed to flatten two of them before they reached cover, then relaxed while he reloaded and watched Magurth lob a grenade neatly into the cockpit and flatten for the explosion. Magurth waited a matter of fifteen seconds for gasoline to leak from the punctured tanks and lobbed a second grenade which set the plane ablaze. Then back he came, running crouched over so far that every few yards he had to put out his left hand to keep from falling flat.

Watching him, the kid thought Magurth looked more like an ape in the zoo back home than any human being he had ever seen. He was laughing when Magurth made a final bullfrog leap and landed in the shallow fox hole beside him.

"Shake a leg outta here, you jackass," snapped Magurth. "Some yellow belly machine gun crew has this hideout spotted by now. We'll ease to the left—toward the lieutenant's position."

THEY had not moved a dozen yards before a machine gun opened up from across the field. The vegetation over their abandoned fox hole wilted like tall grass before a scythe.

"See what it means to be shipmates

with a professional?" gloated Magurth as they lay prone in their new position and listened to the stream of machine gun bullets threshing the jungle to their right.

Magurth carefully dried his bayonet on his shirt. The kid watched, fascinated.

Magurth caught him at it and snarled, "What d'you think all this noise is about —a Fourth of July picnic? Keep that Springfield working on that Jap machine gun nest."

"I don't see a thing," grumbled the kid. "And stop yapping at me all the time, like Lieutenant Bradshell."

"Look—there!" Magurth pointed over the kid's shoulder. "Watch that clump of grass wiggle when they fire the next burst. Muzzle blast is what's doing it. . . . There, see?"

The kid searched that squirming clump of grass with five rapid shots from his Springfield.

"You got meat at least once; I heard 'im squawk," chuckled Magurth.

From dispersion pockets all around the jungle fringe of the air field, Jap fighter planes were popping out. There would be a few hoarse coughs from the motor getting started and then the pilot, reckless of a possible crash, would take off with a practically stone-cold motor and climb at an amazingly steep angle.

"Gee, I never seen our planes climb like that, fresh off the ground," said the kid in awed admiration.

"Them's Zeroes," said Magurth. "And you got a lot of gold stripers for company, kid, who didn't believe the yellow bellies had anything but flying junk until Pearl Harbor learned 'em different."

Tempted by what looked like a cold meat target of a Jap plane just taking off at a terrifically steep climbing angle, Private Deal snapped a shot at it. The plane's motor backfired. The ship hung in midair for a moment and then fell off in a crazy spin and smashed to fragments on the runway.

"Don't claim that one, kid," said Magurth. "His motor konked before you fired. I was watching."

Like a swirl of autumn leaves picked up by a miniature whirlwind, the air seemed filled with rapidly climbing Zeroes. A shell whammed into the runway and kicked up a small geyser of earth. Another struck close to the repair shed, far down to their left.

"Trench mortar shells from our main landing party," announced Magurth, gripping his rifle and rising to a half crouch. "They've made the beach. Time we closed in to the left on the lieutenant and his machine guns."

The kid took one step in an attempt to follow Magurth and sprawled forward into a tangle of jungle crepers. He got up an tried again, but found that his right leg was almost as useless as if it had been shot off. Already Magurth had vanished with that uncanny ability of his to penetrate jungle.

Private Deal tried crawling, only to become enmeshed in wiry vines that sank spiney hooks into his clothes and flesh. A trench mortar shell, lobbed in from the beach, exploded and tore a gaping hole in the jungle fringe and showered him with earth.

The kid ripped a wad of cloth from his sleeve with his teeth, plugged the muzzle of his rifle with it and tossed his Springfield ahead of him into the shell hole. Then he clawed his way to it.

Half of the shell hole was in the jungle and the other half extended out into the roughly hacked clearing bordering the runway. Mechanically, he removed the rag plug from his rifle, blew the dirt out of its action and reached into his web belt for a fresh clip of ammunition.

But he found every pocket flap of his belt already unfastened—empty. He fingered each belt pocket again, unwilling to believe he had fired all of his ammunition so quickly. Even the fact that the sun was now almost forty-five degrees above the horizon was all wrong. That meant he had been under fire for almost three hours; yet he was positive it could not have been for more than fifteen minutes at the most.

He lay in the shell hole, wringing wet with cold sweat while the tropical sun blazed down on him. To ease the stabbing pain causing that cold sweat, he dragged his right foot closer with his hands and unlaced his shoe. His fingers came away from the ankle bandage,

sticky with his own blood. Then he blacked out.

When he regained consciousness, the sun was on the wrong side of the landing strip—over his right shoulder when it formerly was in his eyes. The air vibrated with the crackle of rifle fire and the chatter of machine guns. Now and then the earth trembled when an arriving shell burst.

THE kid laughed crazy-like and threw a chunk of root at a yellow face grinning down at him over the rim of his shell hole. A grenade came bobbling down the slope of the hole, chasing a little river of dirt ahead of it. The kid laughed again and flung the thing back from where it came; and just as it cleared the rim of his hole it exploded and a piece of it pinged off his helmet. But he wasn't bothered with any yellow face grinning at him.

The kid began singing at the top of his lungs and throwing clods up at the swirling planes overhead and yelling, "Smacko, for you—you're dead. Fall out and report to the umpire." Crazy with heat and fever the kid was.

Then he crawled out of his shell hole and went out into the landing strip—belly crawling and dragging his right leg behind him. He kept up a sing-song chant, "I'm gonna find that lieutenant who stepped on my leg. I'm gonna find that lieutenant who's a hard-boiled egg. . . . Say, that's pretty good poetry, Private Deal. Front 'n center, Private Deal, and get a medal pinned on you. As you were, Private Deal."

Crazy stuff like that the kid was chanting as he crawled toward the Jap repair hut at the far end of the landing strip. Water was around there some place. The kid made twenty yards before he remembered about his Springfield. He crawled back for it and spent a good five minutes brushing dirt from it and finding a grass stem small enough to clean out his rear sight aperture.

He crawled almost a hundred yards down the landing strip before a Jap sniper, strapped in the crown of a coconut palm, spotted him. The kid laughed deliriously every time a bullet pinged into the dirt. Once he sat up, dragged his bum leg up with his hands, took careful aim with his empty rifle at the palm tree crown and yelled "Boo!" then laughed again, a wild crazy laugh.

All this time Lieutenant Bradshell, who had started out with two light machine guns and twenty men, was battling hell-for-leather to hold his end of the field against rush after rush of counter-attacking Jap marines. And by the time the kid had crawled within three hundred yards of Bradshell's machine guns, the lieutenant was down to five men and himself. The rest had been either killed or temporarily knocked out with a bad wound.

That was the first the kid had seen of his commanding officer since they hit the beach. Then the sniper in the palm crown fired again, this time throwing a stinging shower of dirt in the kid's face. He was too far gone with fever and the sun to think straight any more. Just instinct and the training he had received as a boot marine made him flatten out.

When he did that, the cartridge in his right shirt pocket—the one he had put there on the rifle range and had forgotten about—jabbed point first into his ribs. Only his fingers knew what they were doing when they fished out that cartridge and tucked it into the breech of his rifle.

The Jap sniper snapped another shot at him.

The kid scowled fuzzily and mumbled through split lips, "Lay off, you damned monkey without a tail, or I'll bust you one."

Ping! and another shower of dirt in the kid's face.

"I told you to lay off—"

The kid's rifle cracked. A steel helmet tumbled from the crown of the coconut palm. A moment later a rifle dropped. The kid waved sardonically in Lieutenant Bradshell's direction. "Your turn now, Mr. Bradshell. Let's see you beat my last shot for record."

Another wave of Jap marines charged Bradshell's two light machine guns. They got halfway across the landing strip when they started wilting. Not a man of them got back to cover.

BUT the kid never saw that happen. An hour later, Lieutenant Bradshell packed the kid into the dressing station set up in the captured Jap repair shed. Bradshell's own shirt was stiff with dried blood. He stood bracing himself against the door post while surgeons stripped the kid, looking for his wounds.

Stark naked down to his shoes they had the kid without finding a bullet hole in him. Then the surgeon noticed that unlaced right shoe and the blood-soaked bandage. A couple of quick snips, and the bandage was off.

The surgeon glanced up at Bradshell. "Queerest thing I've run across today. This boy has a compound fracture of one of the small bones on his foot. He literally must have walked that broken bone through muscle and skin. He must have gone through hell, out there in that blazing sun." He turned to a pair of hospital corpsmen. "This is a bad sunstroke case. Get him aboard while there is still a chance of saving him. We can't spare marines with guts like this youngster has."

"I'll say we can't, Doc," said Bradshell. "That kid knocked off the sniper who got all but five of us on the machine guns. We couldn't have stopped that last rush but for Deal."

Bradshell's grip slackened on the repair shed door post. His knees wilted under him before a hospital corpsman could catch him in his arms.

"I'll take the lieutenant next," said the surgeon, brushing Private Deal's blood-soaked bandages from his field operating table.

"It's too late, sir," said the corpsman. "The lieutenant has checked out. He was shot through the guts hours ago, judging from the way his shirt has dried to him."

It was almost a week after that before the kid even knew he was alive. Then, about four bells on the dog watch, he became aware that somebody was trying to feed him chicken broth—and that somebody's face looked an awful lot like Magurth's.

The kid looked puzzled and said, "Wasn't we standing by for a landing party, or did I just dream it?"

"We was, and how!" said Magurth. He dipped a spoon into the broth bowl clutched in the hand of his left arm bandaged to his chest. "Pipe down and scoff this. . . . You little rat, playing dead on me in that shell hole."

"What shell hole, you gorilla?"

"Open your mouth and gargle this. . . . There by the landing strip, when I told you to follow my wake. . . . Kid, you sure ruined my shore liberty when I missed you and snuck back and seen you sprawled for dead in that shell hole. I got so restless I went out and slammed my bay'net into every yellow belly I could run down."

The kid nodded at Magurth's bandaged shoulder. "One of them finally got you, huh?"

"Yeah, a dead one," admitted Magurth, disgusted. "I was catching my breath under one of them palms when, blamo, a tin hat conked me on mine. No more than I was getting ready to sing out aloft to watch out for the working party on the spar deck, a rifle comes down butt first and lays me in the scuppers for a second."

"Oh yeah?" says the kid, thinking Magurth was feeding him a line.

"Yeah," said Magurth stolidly, "and I loses my temper and aims up the tree at a yellowbelly grinning down at me and pulls the trigger."

"Now tell me you had forgotten to load your gun when the fight started," taunted the kid.

Magurth shrugged his good shoulder. "It would have made no difference, anyways. When I looked again, I see somebody had already plugged him smack, pinwheel, between the eyes. Another marine, I bet."

The kid lay back on his pillow and said drowsily, "I bet it was Lieutenant Bradshell. He's the best shot in the whole damn Corps, even if he is a tough skipper."

Magurth looked at the kid lying there with his eyes closed and half smiling.

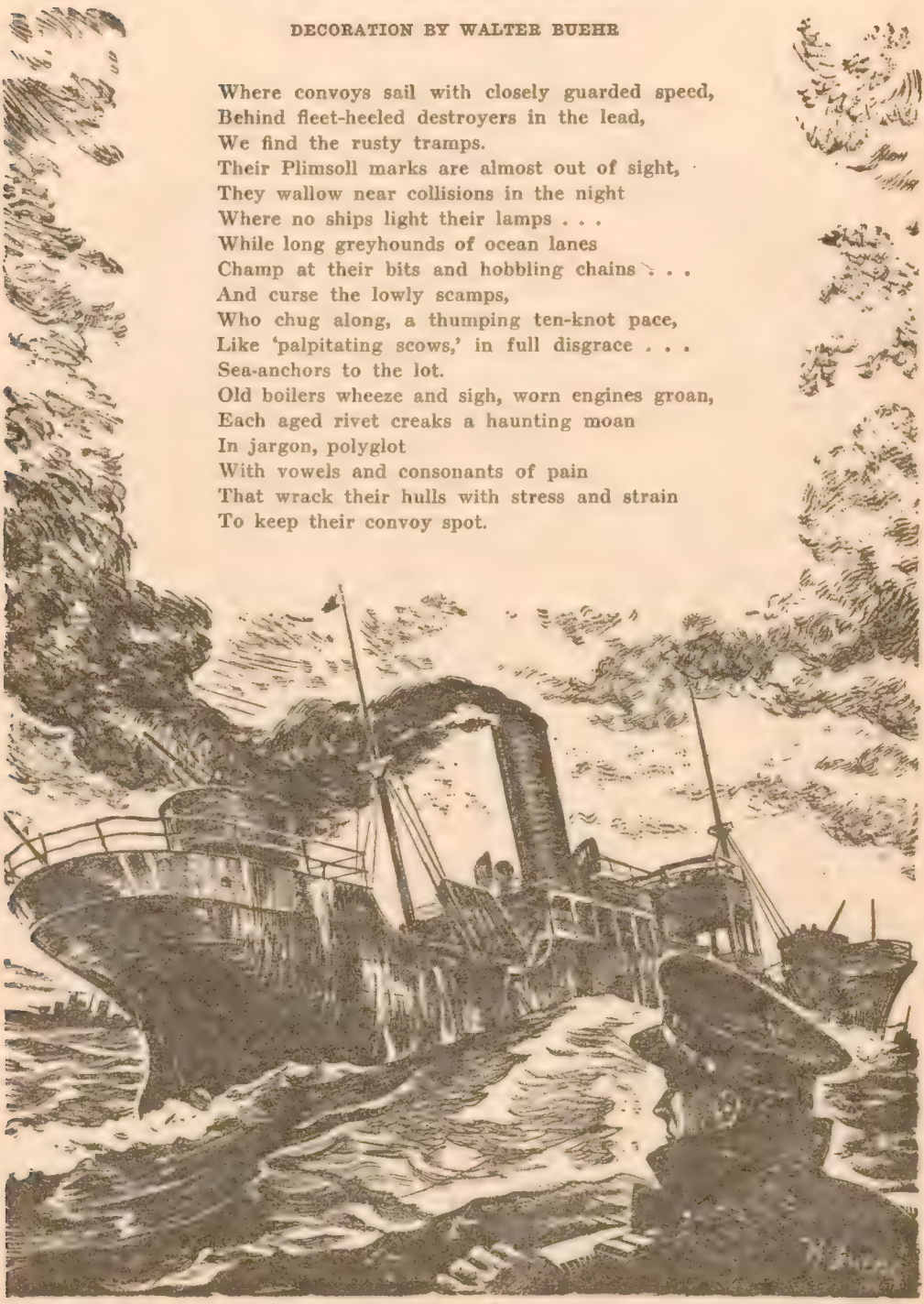
As he backed away from the cot Magurth smiled himself and said to the navy nurse in charge of that ward on the hospital ship, "With that baby face he don't look like it but he's the new champeen marine rifle shot of the Pacific."

TRAMPS NO MORE

BY PAUL EMILE MILLER

DECORATION BY WALTER BUEHR

Where convoys sail with closely guarded speed,
Behind fleet-heeled destroyers in the lead,
We find the rusty tramps.
Their Plimsoll marks are almost out of sight,
They wallow near collisions in the night
Where no ships light their lamps . . .
While long greyhounds of ocean lanes
Champ at their bits and hobbling chains . . .
And curse the lowly scamps,
Who chug along, a thumping ten-knot pace,
Like 'palpitating scows,' in full disgrace . . .
Sea-anchors to the lot.
Old boilers wheeze and sigh, worn engines groan,
Each aged rivet creaks a haunting moan
In jargon, polyglot
With vowels and consonants of pain
That wrack their hulls with stress and strain
To keep their convoy spot.



THE FORGE OF

ILLUSTRATED BY
L. STERNE STEVENS

There was a sudden thunder of Norse voices as Norsemen charged down the great room

OLVIR BIGMOUTH

BY

DE WITT NEWBURY

OLVIR was drinking more and laughing louder than anybody else. He was the guest of honor. And besides, he had the widest mouth and the deepest gullet.

The chief men of Skurhagi, his home village, were giving him a feast in the ale-booth. A farewell feast. His ship was lying by the jetty at Konungahella, a few miles to the south, loaded with iron bars. Tomorrow he would be sailing away westward over Oslo Fiord, bound for Iceland.

The four chanted, "Luck to Olvir Bigmouth!" and dipped their whiskered faces into the froth.

He nodded and emptied his own horn. He had good friends. He was a trader in hard metal, a trader who always stuck to his bargains, always gave sound values for fair prices.

They were gulping and shouting again

jumping over benches, leaping on the board . . . as spades hacked into Vendish flesh.

—Fat Budli and Halkel Kollason, Atle the Short and his long brother, Arnvid. They were wishing him a quick voyage and no trouble with storms or enemies.

Olvir grinned at them, lounging back in his corner. "You farmers! What storms should I fear in midsummer? Or enemies, either? We're at peace with the Danes, Swedes, English. At peace with everybody."

Halkel spoke from the end of the board. "There'll be some sort of trouble. The signs foretell it."

"That's true," Budli said, "but only on land. It may be safer at sea."

The trader wiped his tawny beard. "I heard such talk in Konungahella. Foolishness about bad omens. Just because the wind frightened some old women!"

Halkel thumped the table. "It wasn't wind, Bigmouth! I have a right to talk. I was there, while you were away in Sigtun, buying iron. You should have heard what I heard."

"A noise in the night," Budli put in.

"Yes, a noise through the whole town, as if a great army were marching! We could hear the tread of men and horses, the clanking of weapons, the blowing of horns. And nothing there when we looked!"

"Tell him about the hounds," said Budli.

"Ay, the hounds! They all began to bay and howl, and tore out into the streets. But they crawled back again, whimpering and shivering. Afterwards they went mad and had to be killed."

"So," the fat man added, "you can't blame people for leaving such a town."

"Of course not," Halkel agreed. "I was living there myself, but after a sign like that I left. Many others did, too. The place would have been deserted, only Andreas the Priest told folk to trust in heaven, and the king's sheriffs went around ordering them to stay."

Olvir hunched over the board, his heavy shoulders shaking. "And a fine town, with a strong castle, is half emptied. Because of mad dogs! Well, I think the dogs must have bitten all those who ran away."

Suddenly he turned his head and lifted a hand. "Be quiet! Something is happening outside."

THE others had been busy with the ale and the talk. Now they broke off and listened. There was a commotion in the village—shouting and calling, the pounding of feet. Somebody was banging on a shield, sounding an alarm. A thin wailing came from somewhere in the distance.

For a moment they sat still, ears cocked and mouths open. Then they dropped the drinking horns. Some ran to the door, some to the open window.

Olvir Bigmouth stepped into the road. He saw the villagers out before their houses, all staring down hill. And beyond, climbing the rough track, he saw a crowd of people.

People who hurried and stumbled, panted and cried.

A tall woman walked ahead, her face set in a stony look. Behind her came girls with dust on their yellow heads and tear-smeared cheeks, limping old wives, mothers with children in their arms, on their backs or whimpering alongside.

Farther down shone the glint of steel as a rear-guard swung into sight. It was a strange guard—white-bearded men, bent with the weight of armor, and beardless boys, some hardly big enough to carry weapons.

Halkel called out, "That's Solveig, wife of Andreas Brunson, the priest. And here are all the women and children from below! What has happened down there? Solveig!"

The tall woman answered only one word, "War!"

And then the other women broke past her, screaming, "There is fighting in the town! They are burning the houses! Our men are being killed!"

Little to be learned in that confusion, until the guard straggled up. The leader was Rut Vaagson, one of the city elder-men. Olvir got hold of him, pulled him in to a bench and called for ale.

"Drink first," he urged, "then tell me."

Rut dropped shield and spear to seize the horn. He choked and coughed while Olvir thumped his bowed back.

"The Vends!" he sputtered.

Olvir stared down at the tired old face. "The Vends in Norway! Such a

mad thing has never happened before."

"It has happened now."

More of the white-beards squeezed into the booth, and the story was told. The heathen Slavs from the south had attacked Konungahella with a fleet of three hundred warships.

"And forty fighting-men and two horses on every ship." Rut had recovered his breath. "They divided their fleet, half rowing up our side of the river, half going around the island and coming down on us from above. There were nine merchant ships at the jetty—"

"What about them?" Olvir demanded. "Mine was there."

"Oh, they fought! They couldn't get away. And the men of the town rushed down to the strand and shot arrows and threw spears. The sheriffs took charge of things, Saemund Husfroya and Guthorm. So while fighting went on there, and the Vends were landing their horses above, there was time to get the women and children off."

Olvir stamped impatiently. "Was the town taken? And the ships?"

Rut held out the horn again. "Surely! Our men were to fall back to the castle when the Vends had landed. Every able man stayed to fight. But what can a few hundred do against thousands?"

Olvir felt a clutch on his shoulder. Halkel Kollason was asking, "What do you say now about bad omens?"

He shook the hand off. "Say? I say that you and those like you should have stayed in the town to defend it. I say it's shameful to sit here swilling ale, while down there good fellows are dying. I say we should all grab weapons and go their aid as fast as we can!"

Halkel's jaw dropped. "We'd only lose our own lives."

"He's right!" Rut nodded. "My orders from Saemund were to send out the war-arrow and rouse the whole country."

"The only thing to do," Arnvid said. "We're too few to help."

"Then do it!" Olvir raged. "As for me, I am going against the Vends. And going now!"

"Be sensible, Bigmouth!" begged Budli, his jowls shaking. "Your ship is lost. You can't help that."

"I can't if I stay here."

They jostled around, dinning advice into his ears. "Wait only a little while! Till we can warn the district chief. He'll call out the levy-men and gather an army in a few hours."

The big trader wouldn't listen. "Send your warning," he told them. "Meanwhile I'll reach the castle and help to hold it, or I'll kill some heathen on the way!"

He shouldered through the packed room. His shield hung from a peg, his iron cap beside it. His axe stood against the wall, a long-hafted weapon with a flaring blade. He clapped on the helmet, took down the shield and picked up the axe.

OLVIR slackened his pace as he topped the last hill. The ale had died in him, and he was going to need strength and wind.

Below him lay a yellow checkering of grain fields. Barren ground, too, and clumps of trees. The land sloped away to the bank of the river Elv. And there stood Konungahella, the Place of Kings, opposite the great island, Hising.

The town was burning. Columns of pitchy smoke were rising from the pine-log houses and a black pall hung over them. Some had already burst into masses of belching flame.

But a square, solid bulk loomed against the smoke and fire—the citadel. It had high ramparts of earth and stone, a ditch around it. It would be holding out. As long as there were men enough to hold it.

Olvir reached a field and ran through the ripe barley, crouching low. He trotted across open pasture land, dropped behind a big boulder, then crept forward to a hedge of young willows. Here he stopped, panting and dripping sweat, to peer through the branches.

He saw a galloping troop of horsemen, and dodged back.

Vends—lumpish, pig-nosed Vends on heavy nags. He watched them go yelling by, tossing their spears. In the lead rode a long-haired youngster in a crested helmet, a lynx-skin fluttering from his mailed shoulders.

They were only patroling this side of

the fort, not attacking. They passed, and Olvir started on again. He was out of the willows, crawling through high grass. Nearer and nearer the castle.

Now he could see a few Norsemen on the rampart. They leaned over watchfully, their helmets flashing as they turned. He shouted and ran straight for the steep earthen wall. He could climb it with the help of his hooked axe.

And then Vendish men rose out of the ditch. Eight of them, with iron scales clanking on their bodies, three-cornered shields, and furry bear-skin bound around their pointed helmets.

Olvir stopped short on a planted heel, shield up. The Vends spread out to cut him off. Their clout-wrapped feet pounded the ground as they came charging, their hairy mouths were open and snarling. They closed around, and swords and spears seemed to leap at him.

He threw his axe back, and felt it strike something behind. A spear was fast in the oak and leather of his shield. He let it stay there while he swung to the right. There was a clattering fall at his heels, a clash beside him as the axe bit into iron.

He heaved at his shield. The Vend who tugged at the spear was pulled off balance, dragged to his knees. He tried to rise, but sank face down with a rent gaping in his neck.

A thrown spear whirred through the air. It missed as Olvir bent left in a long reach. He struck the spike on a Vendish headpiece and the iron cap flew off. Another chop, and the helmetless man was sprawling, his head in red halves.

Suddenly they were running away—four Vends—and Olvir was alone. Except for a dead man in front of him, and one on each side.

He looked behind. Another lay kicking and clawing the ground. Dying, with chin split. That first backward swing had caught him with the upper edge of the axe. Sheer luck!

Olvir wrenched the spear from his shield, boomed a war cry and started after the running Vends. They separated. Two ran along the ditch, but two kept on and jumped into it. Olvir shouted again and jumped after them.

One turned and struck as he was in mid-air. The sword whistled in a half circle, and Olvir came down with both legs slashed behind the knees.

He came down on a tumbling heathen, felt ribs cave in beneath his weight, then scrambled up to face the other man. A shield was thrust in his way, but it didn't matter. The shield burst into a ruin of wood and hide, the man went down like a felled tree.

The Norsemen on the wall had been watching and shouting themselves hoarse. Now Olvir called up to them.

"A rope here! I'm hurt and can't climb."

CHAPTER II

THE HEATHENS FROM HELL

HE half slid, half fell down the inner ladder. He had bound his linen leg-wraps over the cuts, and managed to hobble with his axe for a staff across the great square with its timber buildings, the church and the king's-hall. Sigurd the Crusader had built them, had kept the castle garrisoned in his time. But that hard-hitting king was five years dead.

A row of bodies lay beside the church, and wounded men were everywhere. One sat on the church steps, face lead-colored above a stained gray beard. Olvir limped over. It was his own steersman.

"Biarne!" he said. "Is there any life in you?"

The closed eyes opened. "It's you, Olvir! Why weren't you with us when we fought?

"Yes, the ship is lost, and the ship-gang all gone. But we did well! We stove ship after ship as they came crowding. We hurled the iron bars, sent them through sides and bottoms. The Vends sank and drowned. Their whole host screeched to see such losses!

"When they got aboard at last, we knocked them over as fast as they came. Until there were too many. Then they shoved me overside, I swam to the jetty and was pulled out.

"But I wish you had seen your carls die! You'd have loved them like your own sons."

"My sons!" Olvir muttered gruffly.

"And half of them old leather-faces like yourself! Well, I'll never find a crew like that again. Yet better a man's death than a thrall's life, as the saying goes. Rest and grow strong, Biarne, while I get to work."

He limped away, his whiskered mouth shut in a wide, hard line.

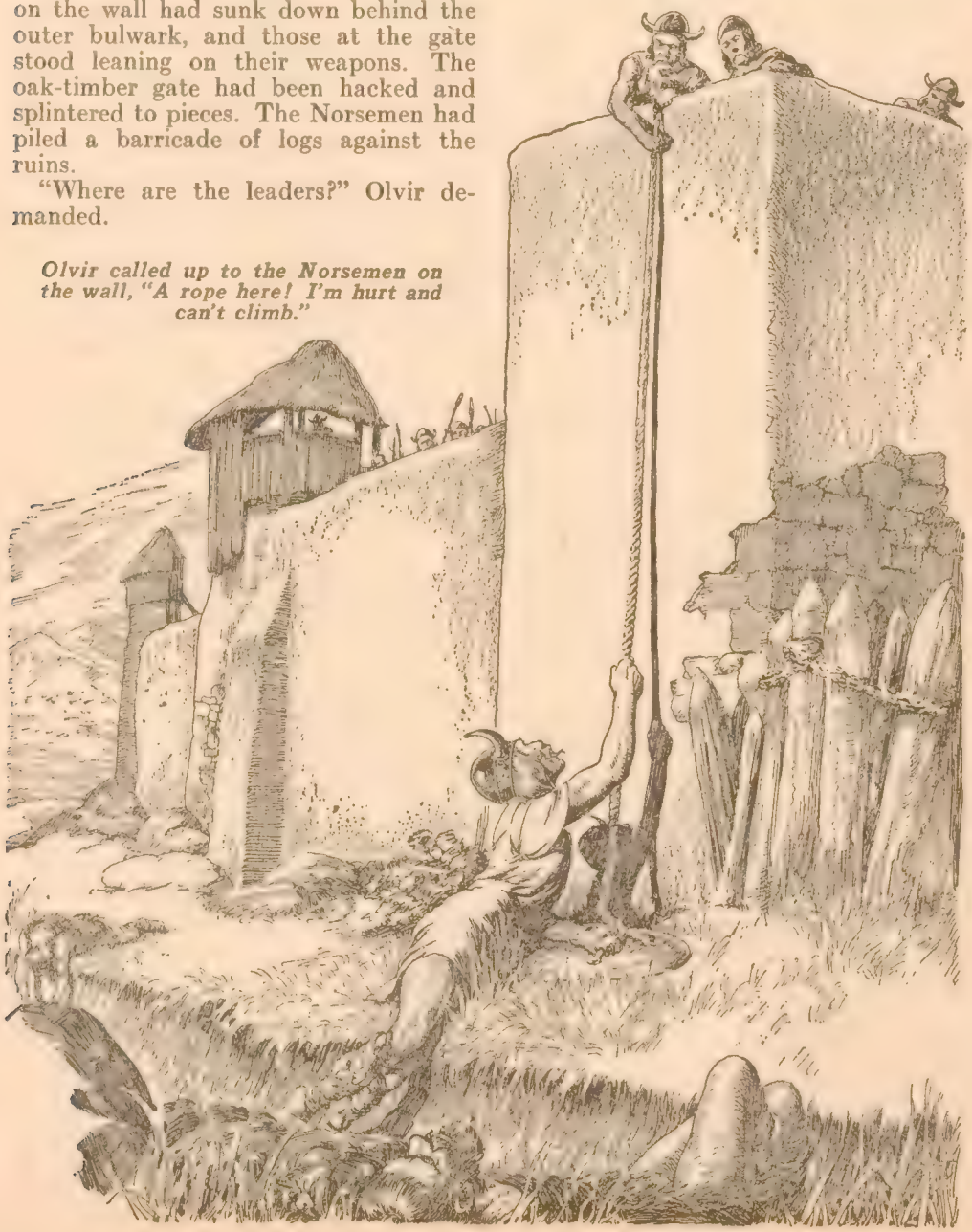
The fight had been going badly, but there was a lull in it just now. The men on the wall had sunk down behind the outer bulwark, and those at the gate stood leaning on their weapons. The oak-timber gate had been hacked and splintered to pieces. The Norsemen had piled a barricade of logs against the ruins.

"Where are the leaders?" Olvir demanded.

There was a stir amongst the mailed throng. A middle-aged man stepped out, a heavy, grizzled man with a red smear on one sweating cheek. Guthorm the sheriff.

"Saemund is up above, but I am here." He recognized the newcomer and swore. "Saint Olav! How did you get here?"

"Over the north wall. If those heathen



Olvir called up to the Norsemen on the wall, "A rope here! I'm hurt and can't climb."

had any sense, they'd surround the place and scale it. I met only a few."

"They tried scaling, and it cost them too dear. Now they shoot at us and rush the gate." He took off his helmet to cool his bald head. "Do you bring any news?"

"Yes, help is coming. The war-arrow has been sent through the district."

Guthorm nodded gloomily. "May it come soon! We have shot away most of our arrows and cast all our spears. The throwing-stones and beams are almost gone. And there's not a bit of food or drink in the castle! Sigurd kept it well stocked; but our new king, Harald Gilli, thinks nothing of guarding the land."

Olvir propped himself with his axe. "Have you seen the Vendish king? Is he with the army?"

"Ay, Rettibur himself. And his sister's son, Dunimiz, who leads the horsemen. And his chief captain, Unibur, who is a hog-snouted devil out of hell."

"It must be their whole war strength! I'll get up on the wall. I can't stand well, but I can drop stones on their heads."

He dragged himself up the nearest ladder. The men on the rampart made room for him, but when he asked for Saemund Husfroya there was silence—until a blond, long-mustached young giant rose from stooping over a prone body.

"He is dead. Shot by a Vendish bowman who must be a troll, he's so cunning and so hard to strike. We have all tried and failed." It was Asmund who spoke, the second sheriff's son.

OLVIR looked at the dead man, lying long and straight with his stiff beard jutting up. Blood on the beard, and the feathers of an arrow sticking out. He had known Saemund well and liked him well.

He went to the breast-high parapet, lifted his shield and peered under it. There was the town, some houses still spouting flames and black smoke, some fallen into ashy ruins. The Vends were all around it, swarming over piles of looted stuff.

Nearer, on the slope below, the enemy rested in solid masses. They leaned on spears and pole-axes, sat or lay on the ground.

Broad-faced, tow-bearded heathen. Some wore armor of horse or bull-hide with the hair on, leather hoods instead of helmets. Others had coats of iron plates or rude links, with spiked helmets. There were mufflers of wolf or bear-skin about their shoulders, crests of fur to make them seem bigger.

At the foot of the wall the dead were thick. They filled the ditch, formed a windrow beyond it. Tumbled, jumbled heaps lay about the broken gate. And many in the resting host were binding wounds.

A chief, a huge, lump-shouldered man, began to talk. He had brass scale-armor, and his helmet was covered by the prick-eared scalp of a wolf. His voice rumbled as he waved thick arms, swung his boar-bristled, boar-snouted head from side to side.

Asmund pointed. "That's Unibur. I wish we could know what he's saying."

"I know," Olvir answered. "I have been trading in Vendland. He is telling his carls that we have killed enough to make all their gods angry. But he says we are only a few, our throwing weapons nearly spent. He bids them attack again with all their strength."

He turned and ran an eye along the defenses. There had been piles of stones and stacks of pointed beams on the battlements. They were depleted now. Men were digging out jagged clods of earth, chopping the few beams in two to make them last longer. He eyed the men themselves. Tired men, moving slowly in their heavy ring-mail, faces haggard under their iron caps.

"Cheer up, mates!" he called. "There'll be an army here before night."

Something struck his shield. An arrow thudding into it. A sudden gust of sound grew into a tempest of strident voices. The air was full of whistling, streaking shafts. Norsemen ran to the parapet with stones, earth-clods and halved beams, or clawed for spent Vendish arrows.

"It begins again," Asmund said. "Look, there's the troll-wise bowman who slew my father! He is covered from both sides."

The archer was shooting through the narrow space between two shields. He kept safe, but the men who protected him were half exposed.

"I'll settle his business," Olvir promised. "Lend me a bow, somebody." The bow was thrust at him, with a few Vendish arrows. "Now, Asmund, you take a shield-bearer. My arrow will take the troll."

The bow-strings twanged at the same time, the arrows went soaring out and down. Far below, one of the guarding men saw feathered death swooping at him and shifted his shield. Next moment the bowman fell backward. Olvir's shaft was in his forehead. Through bone and brain.

A wild howling went up from heathen throats. The Norsemen began to hurl the stones and clods, swing the beams and launch them point first. The Vends were climbing now, working up the turf wall with gouging weapons and clawing hands.

Olvir looked for more work. Some men near him were prying loose a great section of the sod parapet, to topple down on the scalers.

"Stop it!" he advised. "Don't spoil the fort. Better to let them come within our reach."

After that they waited until Vendish heads topped the wall, and battered them down again. Olvir stood there, his axe rising and falling. It was a game. A stark, deadly sort of game. A game that made arms ache, sweat drip, and the breath come hot through biting teeth.

The assault drew off. It left the wall blood-smeared and more broken bodies at its foot. And it left the defenders weaker, with fewer missiles.

They had no time to rest. Unibur sent fresh fighters, a new wave sweeping up like surf on a steep beach. That wave was shattered, too. But there was always another. From all sides now, so that the defense was stretched dangerously thin.

Late in the afternoon the men on the north wall raised a cry. Help was in sight. The army was coming out of the hills.

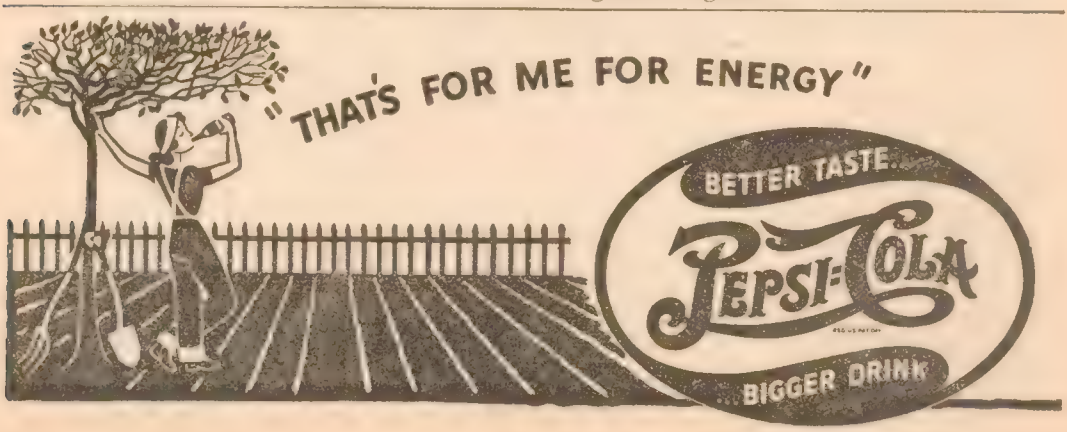
Fighting stopped. There was hope in the castle, confusion amongst the Vends. The Norsemen laughed and shouted encouragement to each other. Every one on the battlements craned his neck northward.

They looked and shook their heads. The levies numbered five hundred, perhaps. Good men, hardy men. But not enough.

They saw the column stream out into the grain fields with a distant glitter of steel, the flutter of a standard. They saw it swing into battle line. They watched, helpless, while a thousand Vendish footmen met its front, and four hundred Vendish horsemen galloped down on the flank.

Then they could see nothing but a far-off fury of struggle, with the standard dipping and reeling above it. Until the banner disappeared and a few beaten fragments of the Norse army went straggling back into the hills.

They turned grimly to their own battle. Hope was gone. It would be days before another and larger army could be gotten together.



CHAPTER III

VENDISH BUTCHERY

THE fighting didn't begin again. Instead a blaring of horns sounded at the gate. The enemy were calling for a parley.

A hail reached Olvir. "Hey, up there! You who know the Vendish tongue! Guthorm the Sheriff needs you."

He got down the ladder somehow. His wounds had stiffened and he could hardly walk. Two men helped him to the gate, pushed him up on the barricade. Guthorm stood there, anxious and gloomy.

The moat was filled with dead. Beyond stood the waiting heathen, ungainly in their coarse mail and baggy breeches. The chief, Unibur, was with the hornblowers, red eyes rolling under a shag of brow. The man beside him must be Rettibur.

A kingly figure enough. Straight and tall, with pale eyes in a broad face, lint-fair beard spreading over his breast. His helmet was banded with gold, and he wore a bear-skin with the head on his left shoulder.

He spoke in a loud, guttural voice. Olvir listened and spat.

"He is praising us," he told Guthorm. "He says we have fought like the heroes of old times, yet now we can do no more. He asks us to lay down our weapons and open the gate, and he promises to let us all go free. He will be satisfied with booty.

"He talks well, but don't trust him!"

The sheriff groaned. "What else can we do? Scarcely two hundred of us left—hurt and worn out—without meat or drink! And no chance of help now, either. He gives his word. We must accept."

The Norsemen around him threw down their swords and axes. Sullenly, recklessly or hopefully, they were surrendering. They began to pull down the barricade. Men were coming from the ramparts, weaponless.

Olvir hobbled over to the church, crawled up the steps. Singing sounded from inside, the priest chanting some Latin prayer. Olvir interrupted. He hurled shield and axe, then his headpiece, clanging through the door.

"Hide these, Andreas Brunson," he called. "Perhaps they can be saved."

The old steersman, Biarne, waked from a doze of weakness and whispered a husky greeting. Olvir sat down beside him, elbows on knees and big hands hanging empty.

Vends were pouring in through the gate, laughing, yelling and gabbling. Gathering up the scattered weapons, herding the disarmed Norsemen into corners. A mob had broken into the hall already. They were bundling out the rich pall-cloth hangings, making free with the silver vessels and other treasure looted from broken chests.

A more orderly party came to the church. Rettibur striding ahead, Unibur close behind, bristling and angry-eyed. Then a slender young fellow with yellow hair and soft down on his high-cheeked face. The king's nephew, Dunimiz.

OLVIR wouldn't move as the three came up the steps, and Unibur's grisly knee brushed his shoulder. He heard Andreas speak and looked up. The priest had come to the door and was bravely barring the way. His russet beard hung long and tangled over a torn gown. He had done some fighting earlier in the day.

Andreas unclasped a gold ring from his arm and offered it. "I yield this because it is my own. But I forbid you heathen to profane this place or touch the holy things!"

Rettibur didn't understand, but he took the ring with a pleased smile. For a minute he admired the carved posts and lintel of the church door. Young Dunimiz said something, and he nodded agreement.

"This is a fine temple. Its god must be a strong one. Maybe he was angry with his people, to let them be overcome. I will not risk a god's enmity!

"Priest, I give you this temple. It shall not be hurt or robbed."

The heathen king turned and swept proud eyes over the castle. "A mighty

The smith turned a sooty face and grumbled: "Throw those things nearer, Asmund. Do you forget that I am crippled?"

place, this, and hard to take. I will have the Norse thralls build me such a stronghold in Stettin. Yes, and build a king's-house and temple just like these."

Olvir tried to get up. "Norse thralls?" he croaked. "You promised to set us free! To be satisfied with booty!"

Rettibur glanced down calmly. "I have changed my mind. I have lost too much here, gained too little."

At that Unibur swung about, the brass scales clashing on his thick body. "Here's a worthless one," he rumbled, "crippled and old."

His sword flashed up. And Biarne went rolling down the steps, brains spilled in his gray hair.

Olvir growled like a bear and reached for the killer. Unibur set a heavy foot against his chest and sent him rolling after Biarne.

The Vendish chief ran down to him, sword lifted, but he scarcely knew it. The castle square was suddenly full of hideous din and violence. The unwounded Norsemen were being seized and bound, the wounded were being butchered.

Not without resistance. Men fought bare-handed, crazy with rage, until they were overwhelmed by sheer weight or beaten senseless. Men half dead already staggered up to fight until cut to pieces. The dying were finished as they lay.

Only one of the red blades was stopped in mid-air, before it could fall. The king had rasped an order.

Unibur growled: "He's useless, too. The thews of his legs are cut." But he didn't strike. Instead he asked a question.

"What can you do, thrall, to make you worth keeping?"

Olvir grinned up, stubbornly silent. Better a man's death than a thrall's life! But another thought was burning in his mind—it grew hotter and hotter, like a glowing coal.

Treachery!

In trading or in war, men must be honest. That was the great thing. Bargains must be kept. Or cheaters must be made to pay.

And a dead trader couldn't square accounts.

He sat up, unclenched his hands and spread them out. "I'm a good smith," he muttered. "I can make and mend all kinds of ironware."

Then he twisted to look at Rettibur, tall and calm by the church door. "You have broken your promise, Vend!" he said more loudly. "Well, I won't break mine. Let me live, and I'll demonstrate to you what we Norsemen call fair dealing!"

A MAN came into the hut and dropped an armful of turf-spades clattering on the floor. A gaunt man with a long mustache and a mat of fair beard. A ragged, unwashed man. His linen shirt hung in strips from his scarred shoulders. His bare, earth-caked legs were hobbled together by a short chain.

The smith turned a sooty face and grumbled. "Throw those things nearer, Asmund. Do you forget that I am crippled?"

The smith was Olvir Bigmouth. He was sitting hulked on a stool by the rough forge, an anvil before him and a hammer in his fist. His legs were still swathed in the filthy remnants of bandages. But they weren't hobbled.

Asmund began to pick up the spades and lay the bent iron blades on the charcoal. "I'll get the knotted leather whip if I stay too long," he said. "Well, I'm used to that."

Olvir beckoned his helper, a lumpish young Slav, to use the bellows. Sparks showered as he beat a crooked spade straight again and carefully beat the edges thinner and sharper. One after another he hammered the tools, until sweat streaked his cheeks and glistened wet on his big, blackened arms.

At last he wiped his forehead with a hairy wrist. "I think Vends have mud in their heads instead of brains. They won't let us have weapons, or even little knives to cut our meat."

He held up the last spade and eyed its small, square blade and newly sharpened sides. "Yet they give you earth-diggers these! And they give me this!" He swung his hammer and clanked it down on the anvil.

"The temple will soon be finished." Asmund glanced at the boy. He was yawning, paying no attention.

Olvir nodded. "It will be a great day for the heathen when they take their god into it. No end to the feasting and drinking, I hear."

The two men grinned at each other, while the bellows-boy went sleepily back to his corner. Then Olvir spoke again.

"I hear something else, too."

"You manage to learn the news!" Asmund chuckled. "What is it now?"

"Ay, they don't know how much I understand when they jabber to each other. They talk about king or a mighty jarl, somewhere westward, a Christian, who is threatening war."

"Another war? Perhaps he'll win and set us free."

"Perhaps. Or at the worst, Rettibur will have to send fighting carls against this king. Albrecht the Bear, they call him."

"A good name."

"So there will be fewer left for us."

Asmund whistled. "That will make things easier!"

Olvir scowled. "Yes! But if the Vendish king must go himself—I made him a promise, and I'll be sorry if he doesn't see me keep it."

Asmund gathered up his load and shuffled away, the chain rattling as he took hampered steps. Olvir kicked his free heels against the stool. A lively movement for a hamstrung man.

The prisoners had been taken south, across the Baltic into Vendland. In spite of their surrender, they had won a victory. They had checked the invasion, made so much havoc that the Vends had abandoned it. The one town had proved that Norway was too hard to take.

King Rettibur sailed back to Stettin, his capital of log and wattle hovels on the west shore of the river Oder. The tubby Vendish ships, along with the slim, high-prowed Norse prizes, were hauled up on the sand flats to warp in the sun. A good many of the warriors were sent back to their farms and fisheries. The Norse thralls were quartered in a guarded stockade outside the town, and set to the work of building.

They had been at it for months now. Both king's-hall and temple were taking shape; and thick walls were growing higher and higher around them as the laborers built up layers of peat-turf.

Olvir had made the digging tools. He had been obedient. He had even forged chains for his own friends.

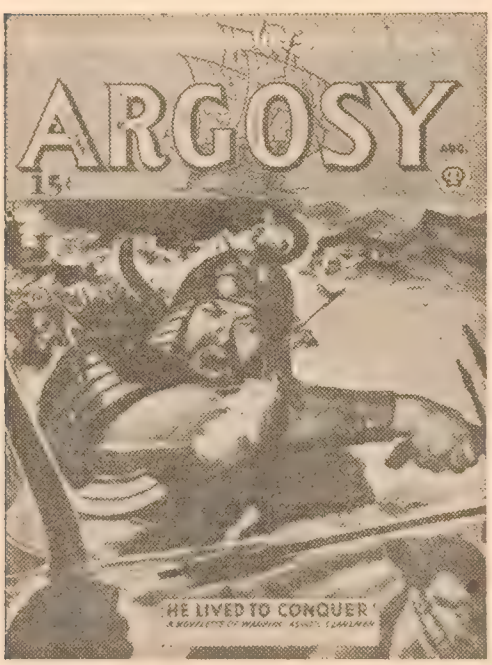
Not for himself, though. A crippled thrall didn't need chains or guards.

The smithy-booth was prison enough for a thrall who couldn't walk without help. Olvir lived there, lying on a wolf skin or sitting on his stool and pounding iron. He kept in touch with his countrymen through Asmund and others who brought him tools to mend.

And there was often a group of curious Vendish folk to stare while he hammered. Baggy-breeched, clout-footed farmers, river fishermen, guards off duty. He listened to their gabbling, between jobs. Listened and learned.

THE day came. A great day for the heathen, as Olvir had heard it would be.

The thralls did no work. They were kept in the stockade, the gate barred on them. Their unused tools were stored in the long shed outside the log palisade. Olvir didn't work, either. He had his stool moved to the door, and sat watching the stir about the huge unfinished stronghold.



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People had gathered from the town, from up and down the river, and from all the forest clearings. But Rettibur was not there. He was away at his western border, with most of his army, facing the Bear of Brandenburg.

"Too bad!" Olvir growled. "Still, he made his captain spare my life, and I ought to remember that."

The king's nephew had come in his place, bringing a party of fur-cloaked and silver-spangled chiefs. This was to be a great ceremony in honor of the war god and the new temple.

Olvir saw the procession come out of the town. First marched men with green twigs stuck in their caps, blowing bison horns. Next came priests, bearded to the waist, wearing smocks of deer skin and stag antlers tied to their hea Some carried the god, Perkunas, an old stone image. Others were burdened with the temple treasure in chests of lead and oak.

The chiefs followed, most of them burly and thick-whiskered, striding along arrogantly. Then a band of spearmen. Then a mixed herd of animals—lowing cattle, bleating sheep, squealing pigs—for the sacrifice and feast. Last came a rampant, pushing, singing crowd, waving evergreen boughs.

The whole rout jammed into the castle. And later the smoke of fires came curling up over the half-built ramparts.

Olvir thought of the roasted meat and strong drink being consumed there, as he chewed dried fish, gulped stale water. He felt himself over. His big frame had grown lean, but as hard as the iron he had been pounding for so long.

"Let the pig-noses eat their bellies full," he muttered. "Let them drink enough to float us all back to Norway!"

He sat at his door, motionless and patient, until night had come. A smoky glow rose from the great fires burning inside the earthworks. It lit up the tops of the forest trees behind and made a ruddy reflection on the mist over the river. The shadow of the walls lay on everything nearer.

And the town on the river shore was dark and silent. Women and children took no part in the worship of Perkunas.

Olvir suddenly heaved himself up from the stool, turned and stepped across the hut. Stepped without a halt or limp. He was not a cripple now. He reached out in the darkness, found his hammer, laughed as he swung it. Then he went out into the night, quickly and quietly.

On this night there were few guards at the stockade, and they had been at the feast before they took their turn. A dozen or so lay snoring on the ground, swathed in skin capes. Only two were afoot, leaning soddenly against the gate. Olvir needn't have been so stealthy.

As it was, the wakeful ones never knew how they died. Two iron thunderbolts fell from nowhere, and they crumpled.

The clanking noise roused nobody but Norse thralls. They were up already, shivering around their smoldering fires. A group stood just inside the gate when Olvir unbarred it—Guthorm, Asmund and some others.

Olvir snapped a greeting. "How many hale men, Guthorm?"

The sheriff had lost his paunch, and his face hung in loose hound-wrinkles. "A hundred and fifty-three," he answered, "besides eight disabled with flogging."

"There should be a hundred spades out yonder. Some Vendish weapons to be picked up, too. The men know what to do, I suppose?"

"Yes, Bigmouth. Fifty are to run down to the strand. They will choose three ships, our own if possible, get them into the water and make sure of oars and tackle. The rest of us follow you."

Both sheriff and sheriff's son were looking to the trader for leadership.

"Good!" he approved. "The shipgang will take the sick. And let them be sure to choose my ship, for one. Let them also break holes in the remaining Norse craft. No need to stove the Vendish tubs—they couldn't catch us. Are the leg-chains broken?"

"Every chain."

Olvir chuckled. "I fooled the heathen well! About my legs, about those chains. I made each with a weak link, and they never knew!"

CHAPTER IV

A MAN'S DEATH OR A THRALL'S LIFE?

A LINE of dark figures mounted the shelving, half-finished turf wall. Loose fetters rattled as they moved, here and there a man tripped on the broken links. But there was no alarm. Such sounds were lost in the uproar rising from the castle.

Olvir, leading, climbed boldly into the glare of firelight. He looked down through smoke and saw great piles of burning logs, each with a packed ring of Vends around it.

Vends squatting and lying asprawl, passing the slopping measures of black beer and mead from hand to hand. Gabbling, yelling and singing. Leaping up to caper, falling again and rolling on the ground. A horned priest was dancing in a cleared space, hide mantle flapping and stag antlers swaying on his head.

It was easier going down than up. The ladders were in place on this side. The Norsemen went, clattering their loose chains, gripping the long-handled tools that were now edged weapons, and pushed amongst the crowd below.

A crowd too drunk to know or care who they were. A few of the drinkers stared stupidly. One blundered against Olvir, offering a dripping cup. He swallowed the stuff gratefully and upset the man as he strode by.

"To the temple!" The word was passed back. "The chiefs are feasting there."

He led his spade-men between the fires, then tramping and jangling up the steps and in at the open door.

Fish-oil lamps were flaring, the smoky light falling on the flushed, sweating faces along the board. At the far end sat the head priest, one of his antlers fallen off, the other hanging crooked. The other priests were ranged on one side, and opposite lolled the chiefs. Dunimiz, Unibur and forty more, all heavy with eating and drinking.

The board was littered with greasy bones, and with measures of beer, mead, wine from the south. The floor was strewed with bones, too, the walls on each side were spattered high with blood. The blood of sacrificed animals, ceremonially sprinkled. A bowl of it stood on the altar before Perkunas.

These Vends were drunk enough, but not so senseless as the others. Heads turned, bleared eyes blinked at the grim column filing in. Then a hoarse grunt came from Unibur. He lumbered up, sliding his sword free. Benches crashed over as all the astonished chiefs surged to their feet.

"Death to you, heathen! Now you pay for our friends!"

There was a sudden thunder of Norse voices. Norsemen were charging down the great room, jumping over the benches, leaping on the board, closing around priests and captains. Spades hacked into Vendish flesh, splashed fresh stains on the spattered walls.

Olvir was first on the table. He ran down its length, avoiding the wildly striking weapons, his feet spurning bones and half-eaten joints, spilling pots of liquor. He vaulted down where he saw a yellow head, a bewildered, high-cheeked face.

Young Dunimiz lunged at him three times, the sword licking out like a flame. He caught two blows on his hammer, sparks shooting. The third he met with a mighty swing. The sword snapped off short, the broken pieces spun away.

Olvir gave the prince a merciful thump. "You spoke for us," he grated, "so the king spared our church."

And he pushed the stunned lad to safety under the board.

He was in time to ward off the spades from Unibur. The boar had backed against the wall and stood there raging and champing, his blade no match for the long turf-cutters. Helmet and brazen mail were scarred already, a red trickle was running into his blazing eyes.

"Hold off!" Olvir bellowed. "This hog-meat is mine!"

The hammer fell. The chief fell under it, a sagging bulk.

It was over soon. Sixty had been sitting at the board, and now only one was left to plead for quarter—the head priest, crouching behind the statue of Perkunas. Olvir stood over him and over the statue. Then he shook his head.

"That wouldn't be right," he decided. "Rettibur respected our god and our priest."

Time to go. The Norsemen were pulling furs from the dead, snatching armrings and brooches, breaking open the treasure chests. Olvir stooped and turned a big, heavy-breathing carcass over.

"Good booty here. Two hundred pounds of it!"

They went out of the temple with a rush, and through the drink-sodden mob. Some of the dazed Vends were stamped underfoot, some fell into the fires. Most of them scattered, screaming that Albrecht the Bear had come with his Brandenburgers. Olvir reached the gate without losing a man.

"The town next!" he shouted over his shoulder. "They robbed and burned our city!"

A lurid glow shone through the mist when three ships went sliding down the river, the water swirled crimson in their wake, like boiling blood. Stettin was all ablaze behind them.

OLVIR handed over the tiller to Asmund and went forward to the bow. His ship was sweeping up the river Elv. The other two came behind, oars swinging to a gruff chantey.

He could see new roofs beyond the jetty. Konungahella was being rebuilt. People were crowding there, too, the riverside was bright with mail and painted shields. So the place was garrisoned now. King Harald Gilli had at last seen fit to strengthen his frontiers.

They didn't know what to make of the three craft. Norse ships, but full of men in Vendish furs. Vendish caps and jackets. There were bows and spears ready, there ashore.

Olvir sent a hail booming over the water, and suddenly he was recognized. He saw spears waved, helmets tossed, heard shouting voices.

"Bigmouth! It's Bigmouth—in his own ship! Those are our ships, our fellows back from Vendland!"

Then the voices were drowned by a single roar of welcome, the swelling clatter of beaten shields.

He jumped ashore as the ship touched. A wild-looking figure, his hair matted on his shoulders, his beard tangled over a heathenish coat of lynx-skin. He held a hammer in his right hand, a rope's end in his left.

Deafened by greetings, he waved the hammer and shouted back. "Here's Guthorm! Does his wife know? And Asmund! Go and tell his mother! And a hundred and sixty more, come home to their folk!"

He started to shove through the throng, was stopped by strong arms. Two men were clasping and shaking him.

"We knew the Vends couldn't keep you!" one laughed. "We heard what you did here!"

"Killed six out of eight!" the other broke in. "And two with one blow!"

"Ay, and you shot their best bowman, who was a warlock!"

"Those stories are all over Norway. Andreas the Priest told them, the only man left alive in the town."

He grinned at them. "Arnvid and Atle! What are you doing here, mailed and armed? And where did Arnvid get that scar?"

"We serve the king now," explained the elder brother. "No foe will ever surprise us again."

The younger said, "Arnvid took that wound when he fought yonder in the levied army. I was there, too. So was Halkel Kollason, who lost his life, but Budli was more lucky. He couldn't carry that big belly fast enough, and we left him behind."

Olvir nodded. "You all did your best. It's bad news about Halkel; but better to die like a man than live like a thrall. I speak from experience!"

He pushed them away. "No more talk just now. I must attend to some business. Come along, if you like. To the castle."

The brothers joined him, with others of King Harald's soldiers, all dinning questions. He gave them no answers. The rope was still in his fist, and at the other end shambled a prisoner.

A burly, bristle-bearded prisoner who rolled red eyes and grated his teeth, chewing Vendish curses. Unibur, stripped

of furs and finery. Feet hobbled with a thong, wrists knotted together.

Olvir led him up to the citadel, over the bridge and through the gate. Straight to the church. There he climbed the steps and called for Andreas Brunson.

THE priest came, eyes and mouth opening wide in amazement. Olvir handed him the forging hammer. "An offering to Saint Olav. He was a good smith, too. Hang it on the wall, and give me my things."

He put on the iron cap, slipped the shield on his arm and took the axe. Armed like a warrior again, he turned on Unibur.

"Now, thrall!" He flung the blade high. "What can you do to make you worth keeping?"

The Vend scowled up with his bloodshot eyes. Olvir watched him, grinning.

"I have taken my ship back," he taunted, "and revenged my crew. Nothing left but your debt, the debt for my steersman. Shall I sell you to some farmer, hog, to root in the dirt? Or shall I knock your brains out?"

Unibur said nothing, but his thick arms knotted as he fought the thongs. Olvir watched, and the grin left his wide mouth. "This is certainly justice," he muttered, "yet it doesn't please me."

He stopped uncertainly, then grumbled again. "You acted like a heathen. But you are a heathen, and a Christian should behave better."

The chief spit a curse at him, wrenching helplessly at the strong leathers. Olvir went down the steps and cut those thongs. Carefully, with the edge of his axe. The prisoner stood still, quivering, while he did it.

"Let no one hinder us!" He stepped back, dropped his shield and threw away his axe.

Unibur's eyes burned redder and redder. He flexed his great arms, working the cramped muscles limber. Suddenly he gave a boar's grunt and took Olvir by the throat.

The two toppled, hit the earth with a thud and rolled. Olvir came uppermost. The Vend's grip was mostly beard, but he had fastened his own hooked hands under the other's bristles. He held on while the solid body under him writhed.

A heave, and now Unibur was on top. He shifted his hold. Olvir felt broad thumbs sinking into his gullet. Blood throbbed in his brain.

Locked together, heaving and straining, grinding each other into the dirt. Both blind, both choking. Both dying stubbornly. At least it seemed so, until Olvir gave a mighty lift. He hoisted the Vend half upright and slammed him down again.

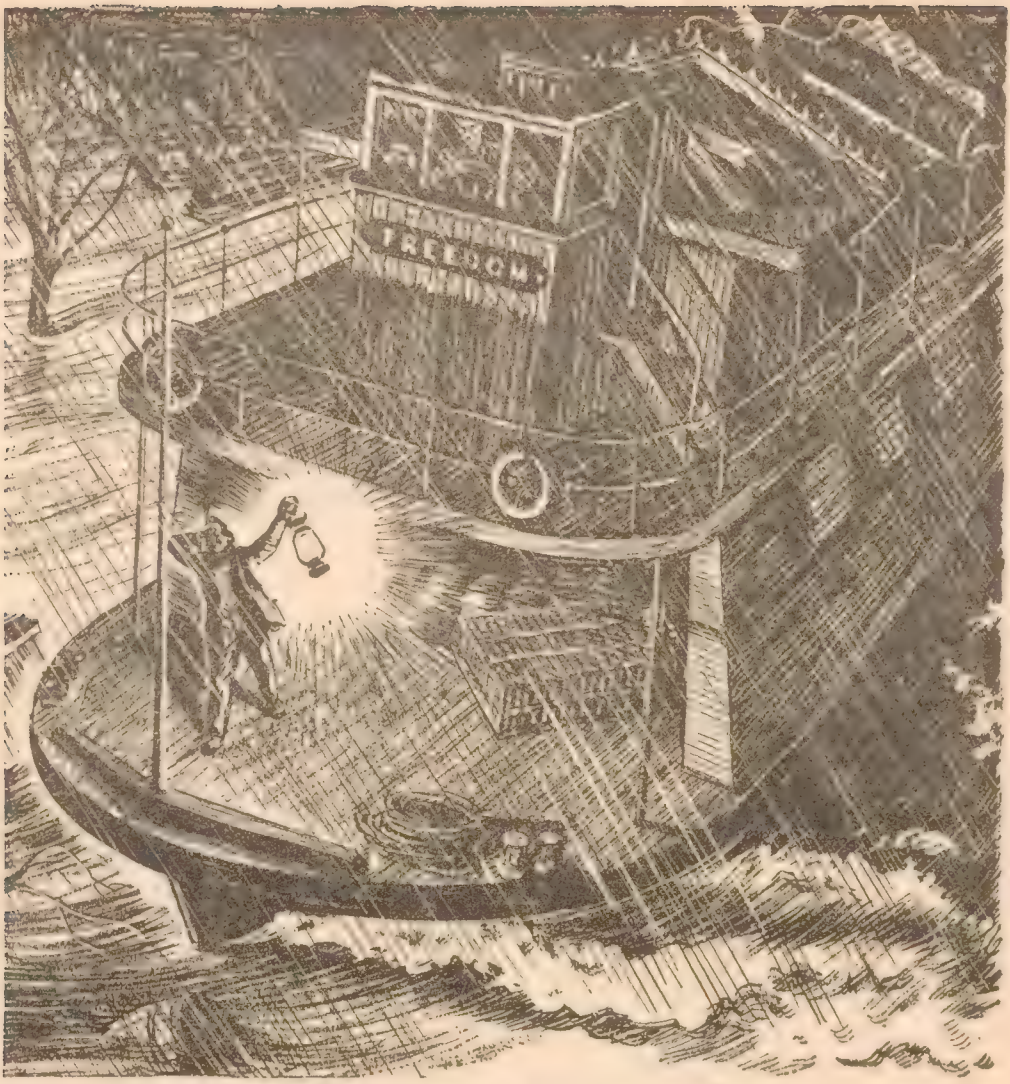
Unibur's round, rough-pelted head struck the ground. Struck with a sounding crack. His bulk jerked, went slack under Olvir's hands. And slowly—it was almost on the spot where Biarne's blood had puddled the dust—a soaking wetness spread into red mud.

Olvir got to his feet, gasping and retching. He panted for a while, wiped his beard, rubbed half-blinded eyes. Then he looked down on the flaccid heap of bone and brawn, and spoke his mind.

"A hog you were, Vend. But a brave hog, like the old tusked one of the woods. Maybe you deserved thralldom. Yet I'm glad I gave you a man's death!"

He turned to the staring group around him, his friends, the priest, the king's soldiers. "Well, I like to settle accounts in a fair way. Is there any ale in Konungahella?"

A hundred yards from Duniap's house they heard him yell, "I see your light! Come ahead as she lays!"



STEAMBOAT MAN

BY HUGH WILEY

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER BUEHR

HEADING upstream in Old River from Fedora the crew of five on board the *Freedom* included one dog. In the narrow pilot house of the dilapidated little stern-wheeler Cap stood at the wheel on his two hind legs and steered the boat. Cap was a fat brown mixture of water spaniel and something else. He weighed about sixty pounds, including his three-foot tail, and while he was not the best helmsman on the lower Mississippi he at least obeyed his master's orders and never got drunk.

Cap's master, young Jim Gamblin, age thirteen, lay curled up on the high seat against the back wall of the pilot house, clerking out the month's tangled freight accounts. There were only half a dozen shippers along Old River but each account involved ten or fifteen items and

young Jim had trusted some of the details to his memory. Old man Rand's vegetables and York's milk ranch were all balled up.

Cap whined and looked around at Jim.

Jim sat up quickly and sized up the river. A drifting tree lay ahead of the *Freedom.* Jim yelled at Cap, "Stabberd! Stabberd—you long tailed son of a baboon! You seen that drifter!"

Cap walked the wheel over a couple of spokes and turned to look at his master again, awaiting the next command as the drifting tree slid past.

"Straighten her up," the boy directed. "What you waitin' for? That's it—but for two cents I'd make you handle this clerk's job and loaf at the wheel myself."

Jim returned to his tangled freight accounts.

Half a mile further on, old Rip Springer, the Negro fireman, called up to Jim from the bow of the *Freedom,* "Better grab dat wheel f'm dat Cap dog befo' us climbs de bank! Tell him he kaint chase no rabbits wid dis boat."

JIM grabbed the wheel and swung the *Freedom* away from the willows that fringed Cane Island. He remained at his post for the next two miles until they reached the landing in front of Searcy's house. Searcy and three of his kids waited on the bank. The kids were tailing on a rope that was hitched around the hind legs of six middleweight hogs.

Rip heaved a light headline to Searcy. From his engine room Uncle Dan Harvey limped forward to pass the time of day with the hog owner. Aunt Laura Harvey ambled out of her hot little galley on the boiler deck to get a breath of fresh air. Rip slid a narrow gangplank over the *Freedom's* bow and shuffled ashore. He carried the hogs aboard one at a time and lowered them into a pen on deck ahead of the coal bunkers. The hogs protested violently and Cap prowled out of the pilot house to size things up, ready to help the panting Rip if the chance offered.

Midway of the narrow gangplank a hundred pound hog kicked himself and Rip into the river. Rip pulled himself out, rolling his eyes toward Dan Harvey and the hog-owning Searcy, attempting to estimate his impending fate. There was no fate. Other events claimed the audience. The hog had started across the wide river, cutting at his own throat with his front hoofs. From the pilot house young Jim spoke to Cap, "Git that hog!" he ordered. "Fetch him ashore!"

Cap went over the high side from the boiler deck and started swimming after the fugitive. He brought him ashore, chewing on the hog's ear, a hundred feet downstream.

"Never mind tryin' to ketch that shoat," Searcy said. "That scoundrel will be mighty glad to anchor himself on my front porch tonight if the river keeps floodin' up like she is."

Cap shook himself dry and climbed up to the pilot house with young Jim. "That's a good dog," Jim said, smiling down at Cap. "For a dog you're a first-class river man." Cap wagged his tail and lay down to pant.

"Freight will be a dollar a shot on those hogs," Dan Harvey called to Searcy from below. "Double what she was."

Searcy thought this over. "All right," he said. "But holy old alligators! That banker in Fedora been pesterin' you lately?"

"Some," Dan Harvey admitted. "Webster is all right. Just figger where I'd have been if he hadn't helped me the time I had to have new boilers f'r this boat. Old Sam Webster is all right—in his way."

Old Sam Webster, the president of the Fedora National was all right in some ways but at the moment he was all set to drop the boom on Dan Harvey and the *Freedom* for an overdue note amounting to eleven hundred spent dollars and a heavy slug of interest. Enjoying a dash of inside dope, old Sam Webster saw a ten-thousand dollar profit looming up on the mortgage that he held against the little boat. A war baby—paying off ten for one. Fair enough, and strictly business—to slap an execution on the *Freedom* and walk away with the profit. He called Sheriff Borland's office. It took all of three minutes to rig the deal. "I'll nail Dan tonight when the

Freedom gits in from up river," the sheriff promised.

BEFORE the *Freedom* backed away from Searcy's landing a heavy rain began to fall, veiling the willows along the Cane Island shore and softening the outlines of the larger trees along the higher land to the West.

Midway of the eight mile stretch upstream to York's a slashing cloudburst swept across the rolling yellow flood, carried on erratic gusts of wind that compelled Jim to relieve Cap at the wheel. In the storm Jim let his thoughts range to wider seas. For a while the *Freedom* was an airplane carrier. Her bombers and fighters took off for their battles in the skies above the Coral Sea. The radio cleared: "Twelve Zero fighters . . . a Jap carrier . . . a Kawanishi at eighty-five hundred feet." Jim recognized Commander Jorgensen's voice, "Wait a minute!" the Commander said. "Wait, and I'll show him to you!"

The Kawanishi came spinning down in flames.

Commander Bob Dixon came in then strong and clear, "Scratch one flat top."

Another big enemy carrier had bit the dust! Jim gritted his teeth and scowled at Cap. "How do you like that, you slant-eyed rising son of a chrysanthemum," he snarled. "You better just harikari yourself when Bob Dixon—"

Cap's reply was lost in a growl of static from the deck below. "Mist' Jim, you better wake up Mist' Dan in de enjine room wid dat stoppin' bell," Rip Springer suggested. "Give him de big gong right now—else dis boat gwine to ride us past York's as fur as Alaska."

Jim frowned at Cap and fired a final command into the radio from his B25, "O.K., gang! Jimmy Doolittle speaking. Let's go to Tokyo! Bomb the hell out of the cockeyed lice and blast the pants off of that damn hatchet-faced emperor!"

The *Freedom* drifted back to York's landing from Tokyo and quartered in to pick up six cans of watered milk.

At Morgan's place three crates of saturated hens and a calf came aboard to clutter up the forward deck. "I seen Rand gittin' some sacks of spuds down to his landin' before the rain started," Morgan announced. "Looks like he's dang near flooded out. Seems like this country is gettin' a special baptisin' this time."

"That new railroad grade is probably pushin' a lot of water into Turkey Slough like we figgered it would," Dan Harvey said. "Got her all damned up an' comin' this way from Dunlap's down."

"Leave it to them surveyors," Morgan agreed. "They rig up a fancy map f'r the ol' River to follow—an' then us fellers is lucky to swim out alive. Tell Rand I got to come over an' live at his place a spell if she goes another three feet higher."

Joe Rand, who had retreated to his little house on the high ground, contributed ten sacks of potatoes to the *Freedom's* cargo. A wet note was tied to an ear of one of the potato sacks, "Dake said he had no freight. He rowed over to Helvin's today. Joe Rand."

Rip took the note back to Dan Harvey in the engine room. "Here's a letter whut was tied on to one sack."

Harvey read the note. "O.K.," he said to Rip. "We don't have to go up to Dake's. Dunlap must of got out already. Tell Jimmy to head her out to the River —and back to town. Lucky—gittin' back before dark."

There was a lot of heavy drift running in the ten-mile stretch to the junction of Old River and the Mississippi. The current was with the *Freedom* now and she made good time. "Mighty lot of water must be comin' down Turkey Slough," Jim figured, surveying the rolling flood from the pilot house. "Like as not Dunlap is flooded out."

IT WAS hard to see very far through the rain. There was plenty of channel, but now and then the job of finding it was a tough problem. The *Freedom* was a true runner with the current and she held her course well enough but she was at the mercy of every heavy gust of wind that drove across her route. The tops of the flooded willows along the North shore of Cane Island were the only landmarks now and these were

grayed out by the rain over much of the way. Jim called down to Rip Springer a mile or two before they reached the Mississippi, "Keep your eye peeled for the river, down there. I can't see very good up here."

The river was easy to read when they reached it. The river had opened its own book to all who could read its code.

"Yaller as a punkin," Rip called up to Jim. "Must be dat de Tennessee an' de Ohio is playin' a hand in de flood game. Nuthin' to worry about now, Mist' Jim."

Nothing to worry about now! Thirty seconds after Jim swung the *Freedom's* bow downstream he lunged for the signal board and banged a gong and a backing bell into the engine room. He yelled an order down at Rip, "Come here and take her! Come a-runnin' — on the jump!" He kicked his shoes off and ducked out of the little pilot house. He slammed the door behind him to keep Cap out of the next act. He quartered across the boiler deck on the run and went over the side in a clean dive that brought him to the surface ten feet clear of the *Freedom's* chopping wheel. He started swimming upstream toward a half swamped skiff that lifted sluggishly above the waves spreading from the *Freedom's* bow.

He saw the skiff after a long search, outlined faintly through the rain and the thin mist that hung on the surface of the water. After a last tough fifty feet he reached up to grab the gunwale. He rested in the water for a while to regain his breath before he wriggled over the low freeboard. He scowled at a three-year-old boy who sloshed around in the bottom of the skiff. The boy was crying quietly between bites at a water-soaked strip of salt pork.

A nine-year-old girl, one of Dunlap's brood, sat hunched up in the stern of the skiff with a wet gunnysack around her shoulders. Jim swore softly to himself for a moment and then he swore at the girl, "Damn you, Annie—what do you mean, being lost out here with that damn Lemuel brother of yours? Hurry up and shut up crying before I smack your ears off. Hurry up!"

Annie turned on more tears. "That ain't Lemuel," she wailed. "Don't you dare call him Lemuel, neither. Lemuel has fits!"

"Well, doggone his fits. Doggone whoever this one is! How come your poppa let you loose in this skiff and no oars?"

"I don't know," Annie said. "This one eating pork is named Verne like a heroic man mom saw in the movies at Little Rock. Verne was his name."

"Well, hell—haul him up out of the water anyhow. He can't help what they named him. Grab a-holt of him. How can a man bail out a skiff with a lot of crybabies named Verne cluttering it up and—look there! Rip saw us! Here he comes. You shut up cryin' and wipe your face off."

"I ain't cryin'," Annie protested, "Pop and Mom is likely drowned I guess."

"What you mean?"

"And prob'ly the other childern too."

"Annie, you shut up right now and tell how they got drownded. I'll bet they ain't."

"Pop put me an' Verne in the skiff tied to the roof of the porch. The water was all deep in the front room downstairs. We was in the attic. Then a tree come drifting along and took me and Verne and the front porch with it."

"Hold on to Verne while I grab that line!"

The *Freedom*, hanging in the current under a slow bell, edged over toward the battered skiff. Aunt Laura Harvey stood ready with a light hand line. Jim caught the first throw and pulled the skiff over to the *Freedom's* side. "Dunlap's house is flooded clean to the attic!" he announced. "A drifter snagged the skiff and the porch away!" He handed the squalling Verne up to Aunt Laura and helped Annie climb to the *Freedom's* deck. "We got to go up there and help 'em!"

"Got to get there right away," Dan Harvey agreed, heading back to his engine room. "Tell Rip to give me lots of steam when you take over."

Jim made the skiff fast to one of the *Freedom's* fenders and climbed up into the pilot house, still wet and dripping. "Uncle Dan said give him extry steam," he said to Rip Springer. "We're heading for Dunlap's."

"Git shucked outen dat wet raiment, Mist' Jim," Rip advised. "I'll hit de firebox wid a spread of coal an' den I'll bring you a flannel shirt an' yo' sheepskin coat an' some dry pants."

"Bring me some coffee with lots of sugar in it—and the leg of that pork for Cap."

"Yassuh, Mist' Jim, I'se a-bringin' 'em."

AUNT LAURA came into the pilot house for a moment after Annie and the sniffling Verne were warmly tucked in bed.

Three red pigs floated past, dead, on their bellies with their snouts under water. "Dunlap's pigs," Jim said quietly. "Water must be clear up to the second floor of his house—if it's still standin'."

Aunt Laura began to cry. "It looks like the Lord is surely showering His wrath on His children."

Jim frowned. "Doggone it, don't talk so sad. Everything's sad enough now."

At this, Cap who had been enjoying a nap, got up and yawned. He began scratching at some imaginary section of his anatomy that might have harbored a flea belonging to some other dog. When the scratching in air had been accomplished he walked over and began his tour of duty at the *Freedom's* wheel.

"O. K., pardner, you help me," Jim said.

Cap looked over at the boy and growled in sympathy.

"I'm going down with Uncle Dan for a while," Aunt Laura said. "Then back with the children."

"Be careful of the steps," Jim advised. "Tell Rip and Uncle Dan I'm going to toot the whistle after a while so that maybe Dunlap will hear us coming and cheer up."

Lady Luck was with Aunt Laura. Thirty seconds after she started down the narrow stairway from the boiler deck Cap bent his head into the darkness and gulped at the rain-drenched air that swept through the ten-inch opening in the forward side of the pilot house. He looked at Jim and barked a quick warning.

The boy scowled ahead for a moment, attempting vainly to see what the dog had discovered with his keener senses. Then, as some malignant ghost might embrace its prey the gray arm of a giant poplar tree swept away the roof of the pilot house and the glass panes in their flimsy frames.

CAP, in a panic of barking, stuck to his post. The poplar limb swept backward on its path of destruction, ripping away the wire guys that braced the stack.

Jim swung away from the menace of the tree and yelled down to Rip through the lashing rain, "Git up here with a lantern! The stack's gone—and the roof! Come up here!"

He blew three shrill blasts into the speaking tube that led to the engine room. Dan Harvey asked a question, "What in hell are you doin' up there?"

"Limb on a tree clipped the roof off the pilot house and busted the stack down. Me and Rip can handle it—but Aunt Laura better come up and see about Annie and that damn Verne."

"Texas roof on fire?"

"No, sir."

"All right, then. Git along up to Dunlap's."

"Yessir!"

Rip came climbing up into the roofless pen that had been the pilot house. "Here's my ol' slicker, Mist' Jim," he said. He handed the coat to Jim and took the wheel while the boy put it on. "I figgers us is about at Dunlap's place," he said.

"Git down an' light them two lanterns. Set 'em low on deck ahead of the bitts. We might be able to see the house—if it's still there. Try yellin' as loud as you can. Mebbe Dunlap will answer."

"He sho' will, does he hear us."

Presently, from somewhere up ahead Dunlap answered. Jim swung the *Freedom* into the new course and rang a signal down to Dan Harvey.

When the boat was within a hundred yards of Dunlap's house they heard him yell, "I see your light! Come ahead as she lays!"

"We got Annie an' Verne," Jim yelled.

"What's that? Annie an' Verne is drowned."

Rip's voice boomed through the storm. "We got 'em both, Mist' Dunlap. Dey is both safe."

Dunlap and his wife and three more of their children were rescued from the attic of their house. The flood water was six feet deep in the lower rooms. "I figgered some of us was sure gone," Dunlap said. "House sogged down about a foot when she slid offen the posts. Figgered she would likely tip over an' trap us in the attic—but what the hell kin a man do when the River gits him?"

"That's right," Dan Harvey agreed. "River is crooked as a rattler—an' just as tricky in the killin'."

"Some feller was hootin' an' yellin' a little ways upstream," Dunlap announced. "I forgot. I guess mebbe I'm a little crazy right now, Dan. Figgered Annie an' Verne was gone—an' us a-goin' mighty soon."

"Well, damn it all to hell!" Dan Harvey exploded. "How fur up this mill tail of hell are we headed? How fur up was that feller?"

The "feller upstream" turned out to be three timber cruisers and a boy of thirteen who presently told Jim Gamblin that his name was Bob Blake. The four were roosting along the lower limb of a big sycamore a foot above the water. There had been six people in the party, but two of them had lost the long battle. They were dead and downstream now somewhere in the rolling flood.

THE *Freedom* swung in to the Fedora landing about six o'clock in the morning, battered and torn from her night's voyage. Young Bob Blake went ashore forthwith, accompanied by the three timber cruisers, but Dunlap and his family, lacking convenient sanctuary ashore, stayed on board.

Dan Harvey went up town in the rain to sell Searcy's hogs and the rest of the cargo.

He came back to the *Freedom* and its people two hours later. Dunlap was patching up the shattered pilot house, Rip Springer was straightening out the bent and battered stack, and Aunt Laura was busy in the galley preparing a heavy meal for her various brood.

"You better get some rest," Aunt Laura advised, smiling at her husband. "I don't want to see you fall down dead just because there isn't any sleep for you in this Fedora program."

"I'll git plenty of sleep after awhile," Dan Harvey said. "Won't be long now."

Something in her husband's tone impelled her to burn him with a question that scored a five. "What is it—has that banker been after you again for the money?"

"Partly—but it's mostly my fault."

"Is he reachin' out those claws of his an' grabbin' this boat on account of what you owe him?"

Dan Harvey looked out across the rainswept waters. He seemed to read the last black chapter of disaster on the scrolls of the rolling flood. "That's it," he said. "You can't blame him much."

Aunt Laura blinked her eyes. After a moment, "Cut off about twenty slices of ham," she directed. "Everybody has got to eat hearty, after last night." She looked up toward the waterfront through the open door of the galley. "Is that one of Webster's gang comin' here now? He never uses anybody but sheriffs and constables to do his fightin'."

Uncle Dan looked. "That's the sheriff," he said. "I guess he's aimin' to serve the papers on me right away."

"Cut that ham!" Aunt Laura ordered. "You can stand lots more trouble on a full stummick than when you're cold and wet and hungry."

"I'll cut it—an' then I'll talk to Borland down below in the engine room."

In the engine room, after brief amenities were exchanged, Sheriff Borland announced, "I got a paper for you, Dan. Webster wants his money. Here she is—an' there ain't no need of me talkin' all the rigamarole that goes with it."

"How much time have I got?"

"You've had two years—that's time enough."

"I guess you're right. What is that rigamarole talk? I'd kinda like to have somethin' cheerful to take my mind off of Webster. Go ahead an' talk some high-toned rigamarole."

"Listen Dan—you can't make no fool out of me just because I've got to do my duty an'—"

YOUNG Bob Blake, hailing the *Freedom* from the muddy bank, interrupted the sheriff. Dan Harvey walked to the door of the engine room. "Here I am, youngster. Back here," he called.

An older man accompanied the boy. "This is my dad," Bob said. "He had half the army out looking for us."

Blake and Dan Harvey shook hands. "I won't try to tell you how much—" Blake began, and then, "Hell! You get me! Bob told me all about it. If it hadn't been for you and . . ."

"I get you," Dan Harvey said.

Bob Blake had something heavy on his mind. "I've got to see Jim," he said, smiling. "Can I see him right away?"

"Go wake him up," Harvey said. "He's layin' there with that wet Cap dog messin' things up. Wake him up, an' then you two boys might see how the gingerbread turned out that Aunt Laura baked." Harvey turned to the sheriff. "Shake hands with Mr. Blake—Sheriff Borland."

"Glad to meet you, Sheriff," Blake said. He turned abruptly to Dan Harvey. "In addition to the pleasure of meeting you, Mr. Harvey, I came down to talk a bit of business with you. Can you spare a few minutes?"

Harvey smiled slowly at Blake. "F'm what the sheriff here was tellin' me I can spare plenty f'm now on." To Sheriff Borland, "First, though—what about that slug of rigamarole you was goin' to regale me with? Go ahead an' git it over. Do your full duty, proper an' legal."

"Listen now, Dan—"

"Go ahead an' orate. Give me that third degree."

The sheriff realized that he was in a tough spot but he went ahead with his act: "Hear ye—by virtue of the powers in me invested . . . 'cordance with said writ . . . satisfaction of a chattel mortgage . . . seize the security . . . steamboat *Freedom* an' all her riggin' an' equipment . . . sum of twelve hundred eighty-four dollars . . . an' costs of this action!" To Dan Harvey, "You asked f'r it Dan."

"Almost worth it," Dan Harvey said.

The sheriff scowled. "Twelve o'clock midnight is your limit to hightail off this boat, Dan—bag an' baggage. Here's your paper—an' good day, gentlemen."

George Blake flagged the parting guest to a full stop. "Hold the deal, Sheriff. Wait a minute. This foreclosure—Mr. Harvey's boat is being taken away from him for a debt?"

"That's keerect. The note ain't been paid an' the bank is foreclosin'."

"Cash to cover by midnight—that's the deadline?"

"That's it."

BLAKE produced a thin billfold and handed the sheriff three banknotes. "Here's fifteen hundred dollars—if you're authorized to accept payment."

"Hell yes—but I don't want to take no cash until—"

"You've got it!" Blake declared. "Leave the change at the bank for me."

Sheriff Borland grunted and started for the gang plank. Blake turned to Dan Harvey. "She's your boat," he said, smiling at the old man. "Now for another slug of business to mix with the pleasure of socking that damn banker. My outfit is building the big powder plant for the Army, eight miles up from Fedora. We'll need forty thousand sticks of piling and a lot of railroad ties out of the Turkey Slough country for that job. This shallow draft towboat of yours has plenty of work ahead of her—if you want it. Cost plus fifteen per cent. You want the contract?"

"Steady towin', no worryin' about loose hogs an' dead chickens an' coal bills!" Dan Harvey drew a deep breath. "It's a deal!" he said. "Sounds like a cross between heaven an' a gold mine to me . . . I've got to tell my wife about it right now before I wake up."

"She's the lady I want to see," Blake said. "I want to see her and Jimmy and that Cap dog and Rip and the whole family."

Climbing topside with Dan Harvey, Blake met Aunt Laura and the Dunlap tribe and all the rest of the *Freedom's* people. He seemed to have kept a special sort of a secret for young Jim.

"Go ahead and tell him about it, Dad," Bob Blake begged. "Tell him before I blow up and bust!"

(Continued on page 159)

CAISSONS IN THE

There he stood, thumping his old desk piled high with books. You'd swear you smelled the acrid wisps of powder wafting through the room.

I THINK you have to be born down there to understand it. In the bright glare of sunlight on a city pavement things are real, like they are everywhere else. But in the leafy half-night of the swamps, on the side-roads where the warty toads flop their flat bellies in the velvet dust, over the silty bottoms where the corn-tongues droop and murmur, in the backyards by a lye-pot in

SKY . . . . BY PEIRSON RICKS

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL STAHR

the shade—you can feel sometimes the furtive presence of an unseen granny-woman and you can watch the grass stir gently as she tip-toes by.

I was born and bred in North Carolina. I have seen the knob turn and the door open and nobody there. I have heard the singing on a moonless night, and I have watched the cold flame dancing on a black pool in the swamp. I know the witch-feel, and it doesn't bother me. It's no use trying to explain the witch-feel, either. You've got to be born in North Carolina, and you've got to hoe its fields and fish its streams and hunt its woods. And I think you've got to eat collards boiled with a hambone, too.

My father's name was Sophocles McGwiggin, which is all right for a name down there. He was that same Captain McGwiggin who so confounded the Union left wing at the first Manassas. That's why you see his horseback image frozen to an everlasting attitude of rampant courage on the State Capitol grounds at Raleigh. My father fought his part of the war with imagination and went unscathed till the final days when a cannon ball got his horse and his right leg, and the Pennsylvania soil gained just that much in fertility.

Soph McGwiggin was a reasonably honest man, but he did well anyway. His word was frequently as good as his bond, and when he spoke, men subtracted only a slight discount, and I think the percentage was much smaller than you need for the average. Soph McGwiggin was close to the realities because he had to

acknowledge many facts after Appomattox. But he was born in the Carolina woods, and all through his childhood he could hear a black Mammy singing in the kitchen.

He married when he was well-off and fifty and I am the result. What he did until he was fifty is none of my business and I have no respect for tale-bearers anyhow. But when I arrived he was ready to take things easy, and he allowed himself time to lean back and let his memories unravel.

My father didn't have a soldier's background. He was not the product of a military school and it was an accident that gave him his captaincy early in the war. When his horse troop was ambushed, broken up and half wiped out in its first engagement, it was my father who rallied one small group and continued the movement, improvising a tactic that enabled thirty men to crack an army's flank.

But whenever my father was backed into a corner and asked how, in heaven's name, he happened to invent and dare such a suicidal feint, he always gave the same cryptic reply:

"I got a message from Napoleon."

And that's the strange, unfathomable story I shall tell you now.

SOPHOCLES McGwiggin was born near Stateville in the bloody swell of a harvest moon in 1834. He had a black slave-Mammy to scold him and grumble, of course, and he minded her not one whit. When he was old enough, he went to the schoolhouse two full miles away and learned to fight with the boys his size and to bully those a trifle smaller, and he got along very well.

Soph was runty and tough as a hickory knot, and by the time he was ten I'm quite sure there was no boy more boyish or less inclined to the headachy waste of a man's good time in a schoolhouse prison room than he. He had a nose like a single goober in its hull, and a muddy splash of freckles, and a briarpatch poll, and his eyes were small and blue and bright like Christmas marbles. His hands were grubby and full of weary aches for the tedious figures they must trace upon the dull night-window of a slate. His feet were grubby like his hands, and his toes were stubby goobers like his nose, and his knees were usually scraped raw or stamped all over with mealy scabs.

Such a one, breathing the free air of a yearling nation, couldn't reasonably be expected to sit there on the pine bench, day in, day out, like the woodcut prigs of McGuffey. In those days freedom was a thing men talked about and boasted of and you knew a lively sack of worms like him would act out his own definition of that leaping word from time to time.

But Mr. Stuart, the master, was not a man to be trifled with, and when he cried, "Attention!" in that austere but woman-sounding way of uttering an Englishman's words, you knew he meant *now* and no tomfoolery.

Mr. Stuart was a man with a nose—a great nose, a thin nose, a nose of distinction. It was an old nose now, but it still had the nostrils cut sharp as if in the full breath of excitement. His mouth had fallen down like a spinster's curse at the cheating, but it was made fast at the corners. The eyes were two skittish crawfish drawn back under a rock.

Mr. Stuart was a tall man who might have been six feet in the young days when he stood straight. Even today he held his thin neck stiff like a puppet's and you sometimes had a feeling his was a trunk of the tough unbending iron drawn from a mold in a single casting. But he was old now, and you could see he had got old with a struggle and much cursing. And the snow upon his hair was dirty snow, like the playground after recess in the winter, and the hair itself was a frayed rag of window-curtain and you could see the pink skull through the unkempt netting.

Mr. Stuart was hardly less a baffle-ment then than he was those more than twenty years ago when the neighborhood was scandalized by the most tremendous drinking undertaking ever launched by a civilized person in those parts—and him the master of the school! It was a mighty bout, a sodden exploit of such magnitude that people still referred to

it as a calendar date, as they might the appearance of a comet or the coming of a flood. It shared honors as a thing to be talked about with the recent death on a lonely island of that plucked old eagle, Napoleon Bonaparte. It encompassed the greater part of the month of June in the year 1821. It created much discussion over the advisability of continuing with such a one as teacher of the local young. And while almost everybody agreed that sustained drunkenness (even in the month of June) was most unworthy and a practice to be discouraged, almost nobody was willing to come right out and stand for sacking Mr. Stuart.

It wasn't that he was a socially popular personage, either. Mr. Stuart contained too much acid silence and displayed too great a stiffness for that. He was just a personage pure and simple. Here was a man of culture who had sipped the stream of knowledge at its source, far from the clumsy backwoods; one whose feet had trod the drawing rooms of Paris at the crossroads of the world. What crime or sorrow or what need for solitude had driven him across an ocean into the dense concealing woods of Carolina no one knew or dared to ask. But he had found his way to Statesville in the wilderness unbidden, and Statesville had appraised the stranger and had found a place for him.

HE had come up from Charleston, where he had spent two years tutoring for the great magnolia families, in 1818. But beyond Charleston, Peter Stuart had no history. The ocean that had borne him to the western continent had swallowed up the forty-seven years of living in another world. Almost, that is. Once on the streets of Charleston a sunburnt sailor from a foreign vessel cried out in a strange tongue, calling him a name that was not Stuart. It was then that Peter Stuart packed his things and rode off into the wilderness.

He was a solitary man, not given much to mixing with his fellows, but after a while he got so he would sit down in the tavern and have a whiskey with a man or two. Even then he hadn't much to say, except on those rare occasions when the conversation turned to news of that vague other world across the sea. Then he would talk fast in his high-pitched Frenchman's English, and the short scar on his left temple would glow like a red lantern, and he would sneer and name his Bourbon king "that Oyster."

In the beginning, so far as anybody knew, he didn't drink in private or get drunk in public. But after that enormous spree in June, 1821, everybody knew, and pretended not to, that Mr. Stuart often bibed alone, and occasionally sallied forth roaring. Then he shucked off his English as if it were a loose and cumbrous husk. Then he would stamp and fume and curse tremendous oaths that danced and trembled in that lilting foreign tongue in which his lonely thoughts were wrapped.

It meant, of course, that you had to refer discreetly in the children's presence to "Mr. Stuart's fits." I doubt if that fooled very many children, for the young ones have a way of getting at the facts. But nobody ever happened to speak to Mr. Stuart about the fits, and after a while the fits became one of those things that you see but yet somehow don't exist.

In that grove of stunted pines and mighty-bellied oaks and limber maples—in that small, grudging grove by the side of the buggy-road to Statesville—there in the center of the grassless, hard-packed square of earth worn bare by a generation of wild recess feet—there he reigned, an emperor of learning in a dwarf's demesne, a monarch of the ruling minds of men a-borning, a thread-bare regent in a one-room capitol of naked weather-boarding, grooved and warped and patined with a soft gray cloak. That little old schoolhouse was just like a barn—a small tobacco barn. But the men of the wilderness housed their harvest treasures in the dingy barns, for they had not yet learned to dignify possession with a Greek colonnade. And their priceless treasure, Freedom, born in sweat and blood and loneliness and anguish, it was also mangered in a barn, a small barn by the side of the buggy-road to Statesville, where the free rulers of a free people stored their precious

yield against the stormy years to come.

And Peter Stuart had the gleaner's tools within his keeping, and his pupils minded him and did not, and they learned the outer rules of discipline. But their teeming thoughts could not be herded, and they wandered forth on strange perplexing journeys with never a one to say the how or why except that Peter Stuart was a mystic volume, shut and clamped, and never spread for reading, but sometimes leafed, and then you glimpsed a brief and frightening dark passage half-revealed.

Sophocles McGwiggin sat on the third bench by the left wall, where by stretching his neck he could see above the window-beam and let his eyes range a corner of the Clemson plantation, given over to cotton. By sedulous application he had learned how to get this satisfactory act performed with a minimum of knuckle-rappings and corner-standings, although the wings of danger hung always over the commission and spiced it as a gamble.

"MacGweegawn!" the voice would roar while the frosty head was barely turned from the blackboard. "Take the corner, please." And the voice would snap a warning to the others: "The wandering eyes go to preeson."

To tell the truth, his was a remarkably well-mannered group when you remember what a juggler he, as teacher, had to be, balancing a chair upon his nose and lopping three pins upward in each hand at the same time. For he must initiate the little wondering ones to C-A-T while dragging shinny-on-your-own-side broilers towards the lowest common denominator. But he could do it; Mr. Stuart had the knack. And you may be sure that those who emerged at last from his domain, bruised, perhaps, and a little groggy, had, whether they like it or not, a pretty fair grip on the underpinnings of knowledge.

Mostly, though, they knew about Napoleon. That was Mr. Stuart's forte, his hobby-horse, his passion. That was where your knowledge had to be precise, with no half-answers given a grudging fifty in the grade. That was a province from the world of other happenings in which you toted either right or wrong —and, sir, believe me, it behooved you to tote right!

BLOOD and outcries, smoke and furious commingling masses heaving sabers head to head was what you thought of Austerlitz or Jena, not just smug, ungraphic ticks upon a calendar forgot and tossed into the wastebasket of time. The little girls panted with wide eyes at such a gorgeous butchery, and the squirming boys forgot their shinny-sticks and sat up straight. There he stood upon his six-inch dais before the blackboard, thumping his old desk piled high with books, cupping in his palm the patchwork blue and red and yellow globule of a world in the manner of a Holy Roman Emperor, his shoulders squared as if with epaulets, and his eyes naked with their hot cores smoking. Then you'd swear you even smelled the acrid wisps of powder wafting through the map-hung, flag-draped room.

It was a night in that autumn during which he became eleven years old that Soph had to tote the basket of eggs and milk to old Mrs. Bodur. She had been ailing ever since Soph could remember, and his mother sent her things because Mrs. Bodur lived by herself and had nothing. She was just an old lady with stale breath like a festered lily, who, no matter how ailing she was, always managed to huddle on the second row of the church on a Sunday morning. The reason Soph carried the basket that night was because they had the little nigger boy shucking corn round a lantern in the barn. So Soph had to walk by himself three miles down the road after dark, and he had to come back without even the company of the basket. He grumbled before leaving the back porch at home, and he felt uncomfortable when he got off the plantation and started down the sandy road. He wasn't afraid, heavens, no, but he just wasn't comfortable. He got there and gave Mrs. Bodur the basket and started back feeling small and lonely under the vast roof of the night pinholed with almanac designs of starry pricks unnumbered.

Then he saw a shiver of lightning flare in the northeast section of the dome,

"Come in out of the rain, boy," Mr. Stuart said.

and he heard the rumble. And almost instantly he heard the wind begin to breathe in the upper leafage of the trees.

Of course, he didn't like it. He started to trot. And the stars began to swim dimly in a racing murk. Then he was running, and the stars were gone, and the wind was ominous and steady, and the trees in commotion.

He was running for the schoolhouse now. A few of the big drops like pennies had already drubbed his face. He could see that shack-like haven just ahead, and there was a light in it which hadn't been there when he passed with the basket. Oh, that light—that mellow gleam—that tickling glow! He could have laughed for joy now. In a world of lowering darkness he had found a fellow being and a light!

He leaped up the two steps and came flat against the rough door with a thump. He leaned against the door, heaving his little chest like an organ-pump, hanging onto the knob, not even trying to open the door yet. When he did try, it was fastened.

And at the very instant of his trying, a sneezing fury shook the treetops. Then all about him was a violence of pouring water.

So he cried out above the storm-noise in a thin piping treble, and he rattled the knob, and he turned in a hurry and kicked the lower panel with his heel.

Then he heard the voice within—the voice behind the door—and the voice was quick and sharp like the crack of a whip, but he couldn't make out the words, and when nothing happened he cried out again and once more rattled the knob. The rain wasn't striking him directly, because its slant was from the rear of the building, but it was fanning back upon him in quick, gusty waves of spray, and he was being chilled by an uncertain wetness.

This time the answering voice was close behind the panel. He could understand now that the words it spoke were not from the tongue he knew. But the tone he did know, it came from the tongueless language of the world, and he recognized, without being taught, that what he heard was challenge.

"Mr. Stuart!" he cried with his mouth to the keyhole. "It's me—Soph McGwiggin."

Then the knob shook in his face and the door sprang inward and he was discovered with his mouth bent down where the keyhole had just been.

The master stood with his legs planted wide, staring as if asleep, as if not seeing, with his old face stiff as a statue's. The white hair stirred idly and continuously above his head as though it were a charged and living pack.

"It's me, Mr. Stuart," said Soph in a small uncertain voice.

Then the unbending trunk of iron swayed slightly like an oak sways, and for an instant that cold curtain lifted from the eyes, and Mr. Stuart said in his everyday English: "Come in out of the rain, boy."

SO SOPH came into the room, the room he knew so well, but it seemed strange to him, with new proportions, because now the light was not just everywhere, but was coming from a source; it was being thrown shakily from a burning wick on the master's desk, and the weak glow did not seek out the corners, but left them unexplored with deep, umbrageous bundles bobbing in them, and up above, one solid shudder of brightness in a circle, and the rest of the ceiling just a dirty pulsing shadow.

Mr. Stuart carefully closed the door and latched it, moving his feet with a lifeless precision as if they were a little too heavy for him. He turned and tramped stiffly down the middle aisle between the benches. Soph just slid quickly onto one of the rough seatboards.

The master clumped upon the dais and eased himself into the chair behind his desk. He sat looking out over the empty classroom with the oil flame sputtering grotesque patterns on his reamed old face. You could hear his loud breathing even above the drumming rain-sound on the roof and the thrash of wind in the maples.

And into all this storm-commotion came a growl of thunder like a great keg tumbling in the attic. The old man was on his feet in an instant, his head cocked

in an attitude of intense listening.

"Is it the ammunition?" he asked, and the words seemed to stick together like molasses, thick and blurred. He sat down. "Damn the artillery," he muttered. He banged his fist suddenly on the desk. "Damn the artillery!" he shouted. "It's no good without powder and grape. You can drive your damned cannon into the river for all the good it's doing." He kept beating his fist monotonously on the desk. "How in God's name can a soldier fight without ammunition?" he asked, glaring at Soph. "Can you answer that?"

"No, sir," said Soph, sitting very still.

"He says he can't answer that," said Mr. Stuart, lifting his eyes to the ceiling. "He says he can't answer it."

Mr. Stuart kept his eyes on the ceiling. "I suppose I'll have to answer it," said Mr. Stuart. "Have you thought of the back door?" He eyed Soph down his nose. "Have you?"

"No, sir," said Soph.

The master shrugged his shoulders and gave a little deprecatory gesture with both hands, letting them fall back limply to his desk. "He hasn't thought of that," said Mr. Stuart acidly. "He hasn't thought of the back door. Not him." All at once the wind seemed to go out of the fierce old man and he subsided like a punctured balloon. He passed a trembling hand wearily across his eyes. Then he looked at Soph seeingly. "Don't let me scare you, boy," he said gently. "It's just a spell that strikes me every now and then. But I've got the medicine for it—" and he took a mug from a drawer and reached down under his desk. Soph could hear the liquid pouring. Mr. Stuart straightened up and drank from the mug thirstily, like a cotton picker come to the end of his row on a hot midsummer day. The master set down the mug and pushed it from him. He squared his shoulders. "I'll tell you about the back door," he said. "If you mark me, you may win a battle with it some day. But save it for the proper time, because no soldier ever lived who could play the trick but once. Once he uses it, he's marked with it, and whatever man he faces afterward can't be taken by it."

Then Soph slid out from his bench and came down the aisle and sat on the front bench just beneath the master's desk because he was going to hear a story about war and courage and how men dashed to slaughter wearing plumes and gorgeous glittery, and he didn't want to miss a word of it.

So the master poured himself another dram of medicine and smacked his lips and coughed and said:

"It was Moskwa—Moskwa in a raging blizzard with the grit-snow on our cheeks like small-shot, sifting down our necks like icy sand—it was Moskwa, and I rode myself with a hundred men for seven miles—and eighteen thousand Russians broke and ran. A hundred men! A hundred men rear center when your front is propped against a shock. A hundred men, or twenty thousand—charging straight from the guarded arms of sweet security behind you—and in that instant you are lost. A hundred men where a thousand could not go. A hundred men with courage—twenty thousand worth—and you are lost!

"When I rode back to him he smiled that tired smile. 'My Prince of Moskwa,' he said, putting his hand here, on my shoulder. 'If only I had more like you!' "

The old Frenchman reared back in his chair with his hands spread wide before him on the desk.

"Duke of Elchingen, Prince of Moskwa, Bravest of the Brave," he chanted. Then the glitter left his eyes and a momentary ghost of youth departed from his face.

"More," he muttered, reaching for the mug.

"THE second time was Quatre Bras." He groaned. "D'Erlon, where is he? Why does the fool, the pig, the blunderhead not come? Oh, God!" He wrung his hands upon the desk. "Twenty thousand men march back and forth and up and down all day upon the Ligny road. I cry for them! But no, for he is marching back and forth and up and down. So now I send a hundred men, brave men. To what use? Wellesley is no fool. I never hear about those hundred men again."

Mr. Stuart looked at Soph and shook his head sadly.

"Once," he said, "just once. And save it for the day you need it most."

"Were you one of the officers, Mr. Stuart?" asked Soph, sitting straight and eager.

"Eh?" asked Mr. Stuart, looking down his nose at him.

"Were you one of the officers in the war?"

Mr. Stuart picked up the mug. He swayed a little as he poured. He set the bottle on the desk.

"I was executed," he said, "on December 7, 1815, in the garden of the Luxembourg. Dead and buried in an unmarked grave in Père Lachaise. Rotten, stuff for worms. A wandering ghost for thirty years."

The thunder roared up then and smacked tremendously upon their ears, and the lightning dazzled blue and chill upon the streaming windowpanes. Clap followed thunderclap in quick succession. The building shivered.

"It's him!" cried the master. "Shaking high heaven with his genius. Him with the artillery. I tell you, boy, no man but he could use it. To him the cannon was an artist's brush. Give him the grape and he would paint a crimson masterpiece of victory. Give him the grape."

Then he shook his head.

"No," he said. "No. Waterloo was different.

"I remember it was still drizzling that night and the rain was shining on his face. It was just before the charge, the last charge, and we knew now the sun was going down. He was pale, very pale, and he was fat, not plump like Wagram—but so fat.

"I was to have the honor of that charge. 'Michel,' he said, and I remember how his voice was husky from the

As those thirty horsemen charged, the blue-clad file seemed to waver.

dampness, 'you have always been a great soldier but now I would have you an archangel. This time I need a god.'

"If only I had been a god then—or a devil—for his sake. But only one god stood among us, and he was that. Where mere men hesitated he struck swiftly like a lightning stroke. Where mere men bound themselves by clumsy truths he stepped forth, free. 'False as a bulletin,' they used to say, but they were peering for a naked fact, their ears deaf to the overtones of greatness. Once when the mouths of Paris cried for food he ordered, 'Gild the dome of the Invalides and let them look at that.' What mortal man could hush the growling bellies with one stroke of gilt and glory? Who but a god, indeed'."

"DID he win the war?" asked Soph, and quickly wished he hadn't spoken. Mr. Stuart half rose from his chair, clutching the desk in voiceless fury. He sank back in a tremble, his great chest heaving, his temple-scar aflame.

"They bayed his heels, they nipped his flanks, they set upon him from all sides. They brought him down like the yapping dogs they were.

"Shopkeepers!" he said, and the way he spoke, it sounded like an unclean, monstrous thing. "Let me tell you, boy, some men are born to rule and some to serve, and those with the touch of glory write a page in history with golden words. War and courage, deeds and honor—those are the things that make man's life worth living. I have fed on watered wine and biscuit, and I tell you, a full belly, barren happiness and dull content are not a picayune to the spice of battle-smoke. Damn your fat democracies! Give me the lean life of glory!

"Who is England? Who, America?" The master laughed. "A dull and stupid fellow, multiplied a million times, dressed in somber work-day clothes, his mind fuddled with petty thoughts of family and what's to be eaten at dinner.

"But who was France in her glory?"

Mr. Stuart rose and stood looking down on Soph as from a great height.

"France was Napoleon Bonaparte."

The master stood there swaying, very drunk indeed, and he lifted the bottle straight to his lips and drank from it. Then he stoppered the glass jug and poked it into his side coat pocket.

"Go home, boy," said Mr. Stuart, waving his hand. "Go home."

"But it's still raining," objected Soph, listening to the torrent on the roof.

"A soldier doesn't heed rain," roared the master, stepping from the dais unsteadily, slapping on his hat. He picked up his walking-stick, beat on the floor.

"Rain or clear, it's time to march."

"Yes, sir," said Soph, and the master snuffed the light.

When they stood on the upper doorstep, Mr. Stuart looked down and put his hand on Soph's small unkempt tow.

"You people think you have a government," he said slowly. "You don't have that—you have a compromise! And you shall see the day when men shall cease to quarrel in the forum, and rise with swords. Brother will strike down brother, and the strong will rule again." He stumbled and nearly fell. "But when the day comes, remember—there's a back door in the other camp. Go, and knock there boldly. It may bring you honor."

The sky lightened up and showed the wind-tossed trees like an instant's lantern-slide projection on a screen. The thunder crackled forth like cannon fire.

With a wild oath the master lifted his stick and strode out into the storm with his head back and the cane held stiffly upward. He went down the road, splashing into the darkness—and the thunder rolling on like caissons in the sky.

The boy squatted by himself on the steps, barely out of the downpour. Once—just once—the wind whisked back a rag of sound. It was *La Marseillaise* being bellowed in a tavern voice.

MY father, as I have said, was a man respected for his common sense. It is with some misgivings then that I speak out now and reveal what may cause some to shake their heads and wonder. But I believe all facts ought to be known that history may be better understood.

On the afternoon of July 21, 1861, my father and his mutilated troop, crashing through the Manassas woods on their frightened hunting horses, found themselves at last, panting and aghast at what had happened, on the banks of Bull Run Creek—thirty shaking men without a leader, thirty men with the fresh memory of death snatching at their coat tails. While their horses nuzzled in the creek they sat, dazed and wordless, hearing the distant rifle fire and cannon shock come billowing through the woods. It was then that my father seemed to feel a presence and a Frenchman's accent in his ear: *Remember, there's a back door in the other camp.*

"Men," he said quietly, "I reckon we ain't the high and mighty fighters we thought we were. I reckon we ain't a match for those damn Yankees, after all. But I *will* say this. We have just put on a handsome demonstration of the quickest, easiest way to lose a war." My father paused then, and cocked his head to hark the distant uproar of the battle. "I figure us to be about a mile back of the Union left flank," he continued. "Now we can head over that-away—" he pointed—"and we can circle around, and if we're lucky we can connect with our own forces. On the other hand, we can head over this-a-way, and we can dive into the middle of hell-fire

and give those damn Yankees the awfullest surprise they ever had. Of course, I wouldn't say we were likely to come out of such a fracas sitting bolt upright on our horses. I would even say the chances might be considerably against that. But it would certainly prove one thing. It would prove that this brave horse troop of ours can run one way just as fast as it can the other. And if there's a bullet with my name on it, I would rather meet it head on than have it overtake me from the rear. What do you say, fellows?"

Nobody said anything.

Then my father bent forward and stroked the twitching neck of his mount. "Come along, Betty," he said softly. "We've got a rough ride ahead of us, sweetheart." Then he went splashing up the stream in the direction of the Union line. He didn't look back. But he could tell by the commotion of the hooves that the men were following.

At the crest of a wooded slope those thirty mounted men paused and looked from the cover of the forest upon the turbulence and turmoil of battle raging in an open meadow spread below them. Less than a quarter mile away, a snaky file of blue-clad troops was charging through the tall grass of the bottom, charging toward the smoky Confederate lines strung along the edge of the woods.

In that instant, father said, his courage and his resolution faltered. In that instant, for the first time, he could perceive how rash this venture was, and how unlikely to succeed. In that instant, he was prepared to eat those spirited words he had lately uttered. And then he heard that Frenchman's voice, prim and precise with arrogance: *Damn your democracies — those breeding pens of cowardice and sluggish livers! Damn them as sties in which the arm of courage is befouled, the face of honor smeared! Damn them as sanctuaries of dry-mouthed weaklings and woman-hearted men!*

My father braced himself in the saddle then, and he inhaled deeply. "Come along, Betty," he sighed. Then he dug in his spurs and as his beast sprang from

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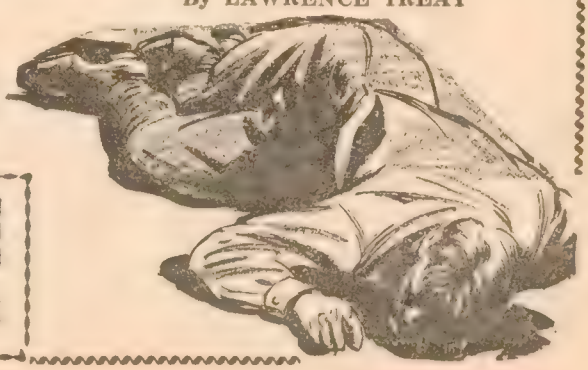

DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

the thicket with a mighty leap, he gave that piercing throaty cry of a Carolina man to his hound-pack, and the others broke after him, whooping shrilly.

As those thirty horsemen charged from the forest into the open bottom, the file of blue-clad soldiers seemed to waver and hang poised like the furthest reach of surf upon a beach, and then the line melted and the matter of it gathered into thick dark blots like balls of mercury and the blots rolled backward. On such a fleeting moment may depend the course of history. In a single breath that confident assault had been transformed into a rout.

So that's how my father, Sophocles McGwiggin, got a message from Napoleon and came to have his likeness cast in bronze and set upon a metal horse on the capitol grounds at Raleigh.

I HAVE stood with my father by the stone in a weed-grown church-yard near the cross-roads many times. And even now when the summer thunder rumbles overhead I think of a lone schoolmaster dreaming over his whiskey bottle and his song.

The granite reads:

Here Lies
PETER STUART NEY
Marshall of France
Born 1769—Died 1846

But the wise men and the scholars, those who compile the learned books and check by documents adorned with stamps of wax, have found it different. Under the N's they have noted it this way:

NEY, Michel, Marshall of France
born Jan. 10, 1769 ; died Dec. 7, 1815
Executed for high treason.

This much I know: Peter Stuart and Michel Ney, whether they be wraith and substance, one man or two, are now very dead indeed. Not only dead like every man must be, but dead like all who live to die for glory—wrapped forever in the nessus-shroud of a million nameless men's despair.

TEMPORARY STARS

BY E. HOFFMANN PRICE

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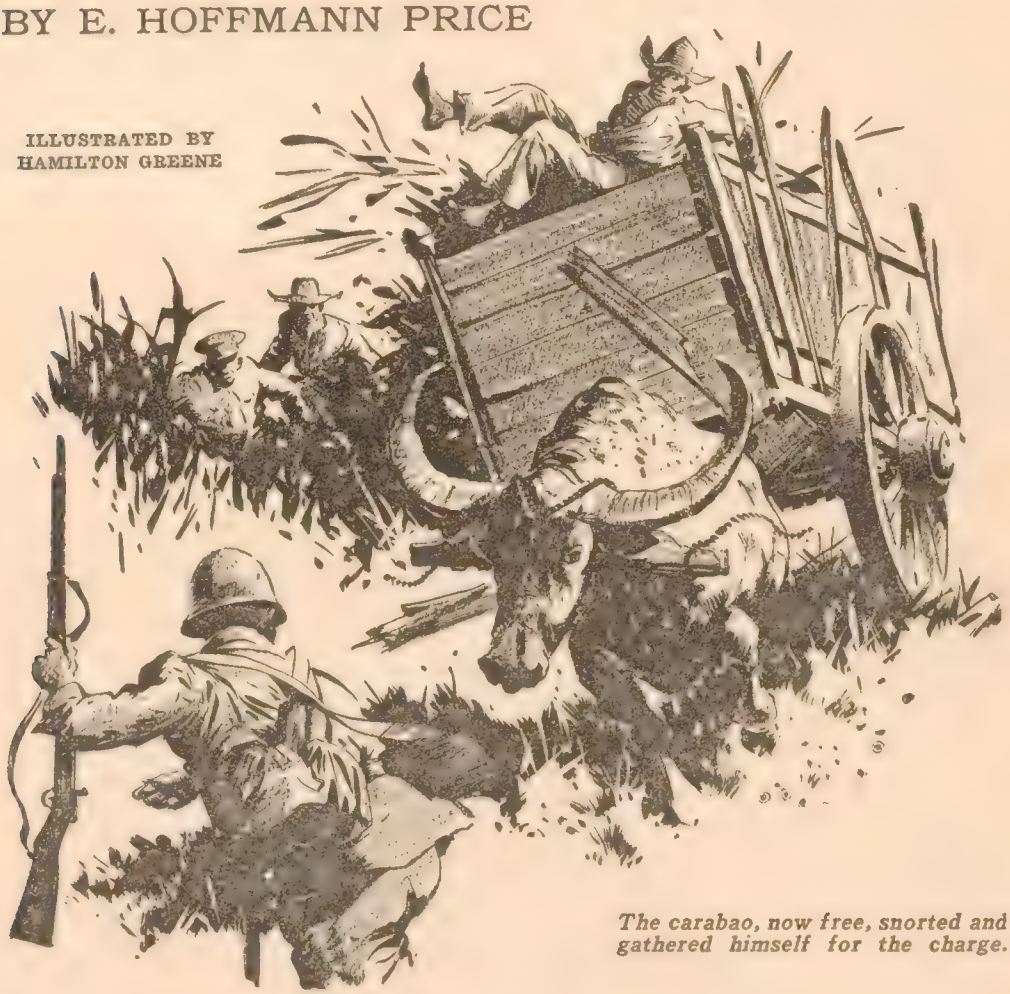


The carabao, now free, snorted and gathered himself for the charge.

KANE was first in a sweat, and not merely because Mindanao's air was so humid that one could squeeze moisture from a handful of it; then a chill rippled down his spine, a chill worse than any which malaria had ever given him. He sat there, ignoring the mosquitoes which the smudge fire should have but did not keep away; he even stopped worrying about his wife, Diane, who had escaped to Australia.

Kane's worry, immediate and sickening, was one that he could explain, but not to his fellow guerillas. The Moros would not believe that he was afraid of anything, and they could not understand a man's declining leadership.

He looked at his hands. They were long and lean and large; Jalat-anay and bejuco had torn and raked them. Grime from the nitrate beds and the iron smelters and the charcoal furnaces was deeply worked in. Twice the size of the small Malay hand, with them he had gotten his quota of Japs with a *barong* whose grip had been carved to his order. Refusing leadership would offend the touchy Moros.

Already, the self-appointed Bishop Jackson of the Mindanao Evangelical Church of the Pagan Tribes had begun saying, "Yas, suh, Gen'ral, yas suh."

Hajji Maulana quit calling him "mister" and began to address him as "*datu.*" These hints were to convey the idea that he should take command. When the big black Negro bishop, now chaplain of the guerilla force, said, "Yas, suh, Gen'ral," it put stars on one's shoulders.

And Kane didn't want such heavy decorations.

He listened to the *swish-snick-swish-snick* of Hajji Maulana's flame-bladed *kris* against a stone. The wrinkled school teacher tested the edge with his thumb, then with a horsehair, and, not yet satisfied, resumed his loving work on the steel whose *forte* had the three traditional blood runnels. The way Hajji used it, the channels were not a formality.

The wounded were stoical about it, simply because those who reached safety and camp would survive. The serious cases had remained in the jungle and, Moro-wise, gone to Allah, slashing and hewing until there was not enough left of them to survive. The Japs could not take a Moro prisoner, and the Moros did not want a Jap captive, except perhaps on some special occasion which thus far had not arisen.

BISHOP JACKSON took a tiny horseshoe from the bed of coals, hammered it, quenched it, then said to the tiny stallion. "Hist up, Daniel-Come-to-Jedgment." The fit was close enough, so he set to work tacking the shoe on. Kane had never decided whether the shaggy pony should carry the black chaplain, or vice versa.

Hajji Maulana resumed his chant to set a cadence for the *kris* honing. "*By the snorting horses! And by their hoofs when they strike fire! And those that charge to attack at dawn, and stir therein the dust aloft, and cleave a midway through a host.*"

While it was possible that he knew the remaining verses of the *sura,* no one had ever heard him complete his recital. The Bishop looked up, his purple black face agleam with sweat. "Gen'ral, I can't understand a word of that A-rab bible, but it sound impressive and solemn."

Kane's voice had an edge when he said, "Bishop, stop calling me general. You'll give people ideas."

Without waiting for an answer, he rose, stretched his long legs, and headed for the low lean-to which had been built only an hour previous. Bamboo and cogon grass, while not durable, simplify the architect's task and save the workman's time.

The ruddy light of a smudge changed the color of the silver stars on Ryan's shoulders; it brought a deep wine-mahogany tinge from the cordovan boots, once more burnished after the bush-whacking task. Seated on a bundle of grass, General Datu Eric Ryan leaned against the support of bamboo stakes set at the angle and in the manner of a chair back. One leg, bandaged, was lashed to a bamboo splint.

A parasol bearer squatted at one side, holding the yellow symbol of royalty. Ryan's four wives, who insisted on following him to the front line, were young and brown and lovely, each agleam with junk jewelry, and each resplendent in red silk gown and high heeled red shoes. They were fanning the man who was the son-in-law of four separate and distinct Moro princes, and they were proud of their selfmade, four-star general.

"I should be worrying about one wife," Kane was thinking; and he said, "How's the leg?"

Ryan grimaced, more from annoyance than pain. "The Bishop likes traction splints, and a traction splint is what you get, no matter what's wrong. Some skibby son had the whole island of Mindanao to shoot at, and had to drill my leg. Damn nuisance. Well, I need a rest, you take command."

He gestured, and the four wives obediently withdrew. The parasol bearer offered Kane and the master a silver betel box. Then came the business of shaping a chew from areca nut, and lime, and leaf tobacco. It was tough on the teeth, but acceptance indicated one's hearty approval of Moro customs, which was one of the best ways to remain un-*krissed* in Moro-land.

Kane found the pungent stuff stimulating, and he certainly needed a lift.

"Count me out on the command stuff.

I'm a surveyor, not a soldier. What's wrong with Ximenes? He's a P.A. officer."

General Datu Ryan shook his head and spat. "The boys feel better when an American's leading them. It reminds them that MacArthur's coming back in a fiery chariot. I think you'd better wear my stars, too."

"There's time and place for a sense of humor; but this is not it."

"A sense of humor is what you need, pal. You're afraid of the job."

Kane's glance did not drop when he said, "Sure I am afraid. I am scared silly of the very thought of leading this gang."

"Don't be an ass! You've gone out in front."

"All right! I have, then. But I wasn't doing the planning. It wasn't my show. I just got excited and set a pace. Being responsible for this crowd while you're getting on your feet is enough to give me the creeps. I am scared and I admit it."

RYAN pointed his finger, pistol-wise. "You are going to take over, and you are going to love it. Or you can go to Australia in a *prahu*, if you want to run out. Your wife's lonesome anyway."

Kane turned the color of a cordovan boot, and did not relax until he caught the twinkle in Ryan's eye, that sane, merry gleam which assured him that the ex-officer was as level-headed as people not considered totally pixillated.

"You know I don't want to run out, though if I had four wives, I would. Look here—I hated these islands, and I guess I still do. But—" he made a sweeping gesture—"I like the people. They've been buddies, and I do not have the guts to—well—"

Ryan's laugh was harsh. "Say it! Lead them into a jam like I did, get a lot of them cut up, and say it was a victory because most of us could run fast?"

"I didn't mean to rub it in, but the answer is yes. You've been trained to command, I'm not. So what'd *I* do holding your job?"

"They know you're not afraid to mix into any party. If you beg off, they'll think you're losing interest in them. Do you understand me?"

"I'd never thought of that."

"I have. So you're taking over. Why the blue hell do you suppose Hajji's been calling you *datu*, and the Bishop's calling you general? If that isn't enough hint—" He raised his voice and its volume would have carried from one to the other end of any reasonably long battle line. "Get out and lead 'em, and don't come back until you've taken over. If it'll make you feel any better, I'll make the plan and you can palm it off as yours."

That made it worse. For when crackpot Ryan, cashiered from the U.S. Army for socking a superior officer, bothered to make a plan, it was so wild that no one but a Moro would follow him or it. Any other soldier would have gone over the hill or deserted to the enemy. The Maguindanao Moros, the Lake Lanao Moros, and the Cotabato Coastal Moros followed Ryan because Allah loved him, otherwise he'd have been killed months ago.

When Jim Kane, one-time cadastral surveyor, went back to his lean-to, he muttered, "I hope for once Allah loves me."

Kane, making the rounds of the settlement which had sprung up in the unexplored tangle behind Mt. Apo, became more and more resentful against the conspiracy designed to force command upon him. Brown men were leaching the beds in which woodashes, decaying fish, and carabao droppings were forming nitrates.

Others were bringing sulphur from the crater of Apo, whose far-off cone, ironically enough, seemed to be a replica of Fujiyama, the Jap sacred mountain. And charcoal furnaces, converted into lime kilns, contributed their bit.

They were making gunpowder. Women pulverized and sieved charcoal, others ground the crude sulphur. And in pots and kettles, the saltpeter from the nitrate beds was being crystallized.

Gunpowder—a crude, tricky powder, which would cake from humidity unless used very quickly. Kane supervised all this, and devised ways of speeding up the smelting of iron for *krisses* and *kampi-*

lanes. Meanwhile, runners threaded the jungle, and came back with brass pots and kettles, war gongs, betel boxes, anything and everything which could be melted down to make smooth-bore cannon—*lantakas* to use in raids against the Japs along the coast.

Kane had a job, running this arsenal in the wilderness. Following Datu Ryan and Lieutenant Ximenes on guerilla raids had won him enough prestige to enable him to introduce sanitary regulations in this sprawling, naturally camouflaged settlement. Despite the congestion, there was no epidemic, and now the Moro muttering had subsided.

"All this, and now they want me to lead them in the field," he grumbled, bitterly, as he watched a sweating Moro prod the carabao hitched to the tongue of the circling *arrastra* which pulverized ore. "What in hell, I'm no Marlborough, neither am I Genghis Khan nor MacArthur. I am an engineer."

But Datu Ryan's leg did not improve. Little Doctor Hernandez, making his rounds from village to village, came to the guerilla camp and shook his head. "I am sorry, Mr. Kane, but I cannot allow General Ryan to lead the next raid. He is too valuable."

Kane wanted to retort, "Well, how about me? In my own way."

The crackpot general was remarkably patient with his traction splint. His four wives were not worried. Each day, they lined up and very solemnly burnished the four stars he had, in ironic fancy, pinned on each shoulder, several years before Pearl Harbor. No one was worried except Kane.

THAT night he sat down to write Diane a letter which might finally get to Australia on the Moro *prahu* about to set out on a 2000 mile cruise to beg a few machine guns and medical supplies for the guerillas.

Kane wrote, *We're raising hell while we're waiting. If the Moros had enough guns, the Japs would pray for MacArthur to come back and save them from the wild men. I had a devil of a time keeping them from staking wounded Japs on ant hills, or tying them to the horns of fighting carabaos at the victory celebrations.*

Don't believe Jap radio. There are still bits of Philippine Army and American Army in the jungle, never mind where. We don't see them, but we hear of them.

You should have seen the Japs trying to seize all the bolos in Kolambugan Town. The disarming wasn't a success. The Skibbies haven't dared poke their nose inland. There's no Fifth Column in Mindanao, and not enough to count in Luzon. But you can't kill 'em with knives alone. We want guns.

You should see Datu Ryan in the bamboo mosque, publicly praying for ammunition.

He signed off. It might never reach Diane. But the letter, if captured, would not give the enemy any useful information.

Then Ximenes, the grounded aviator, came to camp one night, from a long tour of spying along the coast. He said to Kane, "The Japs are working the Cebu Cement Factory day and night; they need concrete for military work somewhere. But the town is held too strongly."

"To say nothing of being too far away."

The wiry little officer winked. "Datu Ryan had a navy at his estate. A crew of coast Moros. Reformed pirates. We harass shipping, we land in Cebu."

"Ask Ryan, I'm busy."

But he went with Ximenes.

The wounded *datu* liked the idea. He chuckled and said, "My mugs got good training, ferrying passengers across the river, and they can cuss like old salts. We ought to try it."

Ximenes went on, "Then in Panay. The rum distillery. Now it makes high-proof alcohol for nitro-cellulose powder." He sighed. "*Ay, chingado!* Those *borregos,* those *cabrones,* they have good powder, and we have home made."

Ryan's face twisted in that ironic grin. "Rescue a rum distillery from a fate worse than death. I like that. Panay rum was made to drink, not to go into Skibby ammunition. Kane — there's your objective! Destroy distillery, and if you don't bring back some rum, I'll send you to Australia in disgrace."

Ximenes thrust out his hand. "Congratulations, Admiral! The first guerilla naval operations—"

"I tell you," Kane protested. "It's cockeyed. This is war, this is no joke. What in hell do I know about sailing a *prahu,* or *garay?*"

The old school teacher, still fingering his *kris,* came in, and Bishop Jackson followed, thumbing his brass-bound bible. They saluted the new admiral.

"Do not hide thy light under a bushel," the Bishop admonished. "Rise and smite them. Look what de Lawd done fo' Gideon."

CHAPTER II

THE GLORY TRAIL

THE pressure was too much for Kane. And the following morning he left his arsenal and took the trail. *Cargadores* carried cans of home-made powder, carefully sealed with gutta percha gathered by Zamboanga pagans; others, using bamboo poles and rattan lashings, teamed up to shoulder the little bronze *lantakas,* whose barrels were perhaps four feet long, with a bore of about two and a half inches. Finally came bearers who had packs laden with cannon balls cast from iron.

That last was Kane's trick. Just a matter of flux, and you got cast instead of the fibrous wrought metal used for blades.

Emerging from the "unexplorated" country, as the Black Bishop called it, the guerilla column bore a straight course across the rolling plateau of Bukidnon, where cattle ranged. The Japs, coming down Highway 3, had counted on plenty of beef. The way it turned out, the Japs were beefed, and the survivors went back to the coast to continue eating fish, and squid, and seaweed, and similar swill, after their native custom.

They did, however, have a hold on the Del Monte Plantation, but the Bishop was not impressed. "It say in de Good Book, MAN CANNOT LIVE ON PINEAPPLES ALONE. Let 'em have it, suh."

It was easy going, heading cross country, and keeping well away from Dansalan, on Lake Lanao; Highway 1, reaching from the lake to Iligan on the Mindanao Sea, was patrolled by Jap motorized troops. They consolidated a little north of Mount Alihad, to make ready for the final swoop to Dalipuga, on the coast. This barrio, half-pint sized, was to be the point of embarkation.

Sight of the sea made Kane wish he had a wounded leg.

The Bishop packed up his Bible, and unwrapped his Frontier Model Colt. "From now on, Gen'ral, I exhorts from memory."

Ximenes

He also unpacked a *kampilan* with a blade over forty inches long; it had a special hilt, carved of kemagon, and large enough for his ham-sized hand.

Kane felt as though he sat on a nest of ants. Everything was orderly, it had been a good march; the men were eager, and betting whether they'd sneak to the sea, or fight their way through. But they all looked to Kane for command.

He remembered Datu Ryan's parting injunction. "Never do anything unless you have to. Then do something, even if it's wrong—do something and do it with all you got."

They expected him to do something. Routine had ceased. He rose, and felt shaky. Then he said, "First we need reconnaissance to see if the coast men have the *vintas* waiting."

There was spitting, muttering, nod-

ding; the leaders of the various detachments decided that this was good. There was not a man of them who would not have said the same thing. But they had waited for Kane to say it. He felt a little better.

"Ximenes, take charge of the patrol."

That passed the buck very nicely, and to a trained soldier. But there was more to command than passing the buck. Kane had often heard it said, "Any chump can be a good officer, as long as he has good noncoms." But the way it now seemed, that was getting the cart in front of the carabao. His gloomy way of looking at it was, "You don't have good noncoms unless you are a good officer."

Then he said to Hajji Maulana, "You stay in command while I go with the reconnaissance."

The wrinkled school teacher did not look happy, but he did not protest.

Accompanying Ximenes' patrol was unorthodox, Kane realized, but since this was the first time he had commanded men to go into a tight spot, he felt that he had to share the risk.

So when they filed out, he joined the tail of the column.

They were hardly beyond camp when he heard hoofbeats. The Bishop, riding Daniel-Come-to-Judgment, was overtaking the patrol.

Kane demanded, "Bishop, what in hell you doing here?"

"Jest in case y'all need some speritual consolation, suh. You needn't explicitly order me not to, gen'ral."

The African grin put that across.

IT WAS slow going, down the game trails. Near sunset of the second day, Dalipuga was under their eyes, and once more they could see the water which they had first sighted from the slopes of Mt. Alihad. There both Kane and the Bishop had to halt; both were too tall, and neither was of the color suitable for spying out a native village.

Gloom settled, and Ximenes and his men filtered across the paved highway, leaving Kane and the big Negro to lurk in a plantain grove.

The breeze brought sea smells, and the odor of offal, of fishing boats beached, of larger boats wallowing at their mooring; copra, and the pungent spices of Moro cookery gave their bit.

In a nearby grove, apes wrangled; in the village, natives sang and chattered. War could not keep up its terror day after day. The Japs, Kane had learned, were beginning to work the sawmills of the region, apparently being in need of timber. He had picked up rumors of wooden ships, Chinese style junks, even barges, used to ply up and down the Jap-held western sea, to release steam transport for supplying the troops in Java, and the Solomons and New Guinea.

And that hinted that perhaps shipping losses had been heavy. If he only knew . . . or could guess. . .

A runner came back to report, "No Japs in town."

But this was not sufficient to warrant sending word all the way back to Mt. Alihad and Hajji Maulana. This was just the beginning of the reconnaissance. So Kane went into Dalipuga for a personal look-see.

Things looked good at Dalipuga. The nearest Japs were where Highway 7 joined Highway 1, at Kilometer 33. There was no aerial activity. From Iligan to Initao, the coast was quiet. The capture of Cebu City and parts of Mindoro Island seemed to have convinced the Japs that it was time to consolidate, and take a profit out of the costly capture of Bataan and Corregidor.

As Kane saw it, this desirable quiet in North Mindanao was the result of Datu Ryan's murderous raids in the opposite direction, toward Davao Bay, where for years there had been 30,000 Jap civilians operating hemp plantations.

Ryan, realistic as any native, had said, "They're not civilians, they're fifth columnists. The only point in knocking off soldiers instead of hemp farmers is that the soldiers have guns worth taking. But every time you settle a hemp planter, you're cutting down the supply of cordage for Jap shipping."

So, being in command, Kane mulled over the situation as he waited for Hajji Maulana to come down with the main

body. While the villagers were working by night, getting a beached *garay* into an obscure cove, it seemed that the scouting party should justify its existence.

When Hajji Maulana arrived, Kane was ready. "We'll hit 'em at the road forks, while the villagers are stowing the cargo."

Ximenes was the only one who did not join in the applause. That set Kane wondering, but for all the informality of a guerilla force, he was afraid to go into a huddle which might make him lose face by demanding a change of plans. What worried him most of all was that Ximenes had an overdose of Filipino recklessness, too.

They were near their objective when Kane finally cornered the lieutenant and demanded, "What's wrong, Ximenes? You aren't happy. Man to man, are we biting off too much of a chunk?"

"No, we can take the cross roads camp. We have done harder things than that. I am thinking of that distillery in Panay."

Then he laughed recklessly, and rejoined his command.

Through darkness and jungle they crawled, spreading out, each man for himself. A square of white cloth, on back and chest, a shape decided upon the very last minute, would serve as identification in the melee.

After hours of crawling, the line halted. Each man found his neighbor, passing along the word: "Ready on the right."

KANE shed his misgivings. The Jap sentries had been spotted. Native peddlers, bringing supplies to camp, had reported the disposition of the groups; some were in tents, some in bamboo shelters. The only uncertain thing was the outposts, scattered in the jungle. And Kane had devised a way of insuring against a premature clash which would give the main encampment a chance to organize.

Hit, hit hard, then run like hell; kill and avoid getting killed. He was in a sweat, wondering if he could control the fighting rage of the Moros, once they closed in; he wondered if he, like Ryan, could to a useful degree make the fighting fools retreat in time.

Word came from the right: "Carabaos ready."

At last, after hours of squirming, itching, ignoring leeches which swelled sausage size from stolen blood, ignoring gnats and mosquitoes—*now the carabaos were ready!*

Kane pictured the hulking brutes, the size of an underslung Durham bull, thick necked, heavy in the shoulders, with massive, curved horns. Surly beasts, suspicious of strangers—and whoever did not have the scent of a Filipino was a stranger. The first whiff of a white man drove them wild. From wallowing or dozing in a mud pool, submerged except for their nostrils, they became ponderous maniacs.

Then he heard the sounds: clattering hooves on the distant road, the snorting and blowing in the wagon trail from inland.

The guerillas bounded forward. Somewhere, a rifle whacked. In another quarter, a machine gun drummed and rattled. The Jap outposts were cutting loose. Local bushwhacking combats developed. But all this was blotted out by the carabaos. Bamboo firecrackers, hand-made in the jungle gave the effect of many tommy guns.

Each carabao, with a rattan hamper of fire-crackers lashed to his horns, was charging, holding the direction he had when the first pop drove him wild. And the guerillas, breaking cover, swept after the beasts, and into the surprised camp.

Far behind, the Jap outposts were hosing the jungle, heaving grenades, springing land mines; and they did their damage, but their efforts were wasted, for the main body was not coming up to support them. The main body had its own problems.

Between forty and fifty crazed animals, each fourteen hundred pounds of rage on the hoof, do not help the efficiency of a call to arms. They smashed bamboo huts, and their scattering of firecrackers started blazes. They trampled soldiers who scurried about. Some dropped, riddled by bullets. Others ploughed through, until they cracked

their thick skulls against trees too massive to be budged.

Kane and the bolo men darted into the confusion. They used steel, for their supply of Jap rifles was too small for effect, and there was always the risk that someone would open fire out of turn. Until they had discipline, steel was their tool.

The gas tank of a truck flamed fiercely. Moros danced about, *krissing* the enemies who struggled to get clear of tents knocked down by the carabao charge. "Grab and get out!" Kane shouted, the moment he sensed that the rout was complete. "Grab and get out!"

Bishop Jackson echoed the command. Then he thrust his *kampilan* into the scabbard slung over his shoulder and barged into a store room which had just begun to blaze. He came out with a case, bounded over to Kane and said, "Grab this yere, General, whilst I gets me another."

Kane shouldered the box without a glance; it was light for its size, and but for his haste to get out of camp before the Skibbies reorganized, he would have taken a look. It had neither the size nor weight of a case of cartridges.

The Moros were looting on the run. They slashed at everything that still twitched on the ground, but this was instinct, and did not break their stride. They scooped up bandoliers, cartridge belts, grenades, rifles. Loaded down with their spoils, they headed for their getaway.

BUT already, mortars were coughing in the jungle, spewing up shells which rose high, keyholed, tumbling end for end as they dropped, first into the jungle fringe, then into the blazing camp. Ragged strips of metal whined and screeched in every direction. And then came the *pop-whack-smack* of bullets. The Japs were returning, fighting mad. The outposts were falling back on the camp to do their bit.

A bullet spattered splinters from the case on Kane's shoulder. Slivers dotted his temple and cheek. A mortar burst fairly knocked him from his feet, and as he came up, still gripping his burden, he saw a Moro who had been slashed by a shell fragment.

He wanted to help the man, but that was against the rules. One look, and he knew that there was no saving him. No one could live with such a wound across stomach and chest. But the Moro rose, when he should have lain there. He picked up the bayonetted rifle he had dropped, he wove on his feet, and his gleaming face twisted into a fierce grin.

"Take" he said, thrusting the gun at Kane. "Give me!" He snatched Kane's *barong*. And then he turned, alone, away from his comrades, and toward the counterattack of the Japs and the invisible reprisal which was making the further jungle a hell of screaming slugs and rumbling mortar blasts.

Before he cleared the blazing camp, Kane saw others who, too badly wounded for a fast retreat, were turning about to die like Moros: fury carried them on, and they knew that if they moved fast enough, they would close in, hand to hand, get one more man.

The others, having grabbed, were now running. They scattered like quail. And presently as the fastest moving reached the rendezvous, planes from some northeastern airfield began to circle about. Iligan got a dose of bombs and low altitude machine gunning. So did Kiwalan. By the time they reached Dalipuga, every *barrio* along the highway was being plastered, just on general principle.

"Where's the Bishop?" was one of Kane's first questions.

The answer was reassuring. And later, the black chaplain came in, leading Daniel-Come-to-Judgment. The shaggy little horse was loaded with plunder.

"How'd you do it? All that?"

The Bishop chuckled. "Onct I seen my hoss was safe, I done went back fo' more. An' 'en on de way, when I seen boys what was overloaded, I help 'em a little. Ya'll bring yo' case of dynamite in safe, suh?"

Kane leaped to his feet. "My what?" he yelled.

"Yas suh, I seen some dynamite, wit de damolition tools, so I grabbed some. It's mighty useful, and de Lawd helps him what helps his-self."

It was some minutes before Kane decided he would not be sick.

Then Ximenes came up. "Congratulations, *señor*. Very few losses, very good looting, quite heavy enemy casualties," he said proudly.

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

But the lieutenant did not look happy. Perhaps the glow of blazing villages all along the coast depressed him. But the village *presidente*, in spite of the ruin which the raid had pulled down on Dalipuga, was exuberant. "Bad, yes, but you did worse to them. Only, *señor*, I beg of you sail from here quickly, they will now be looking from the air into every cove."

"I've been thinking of that. We're ready to shove off, any minute."

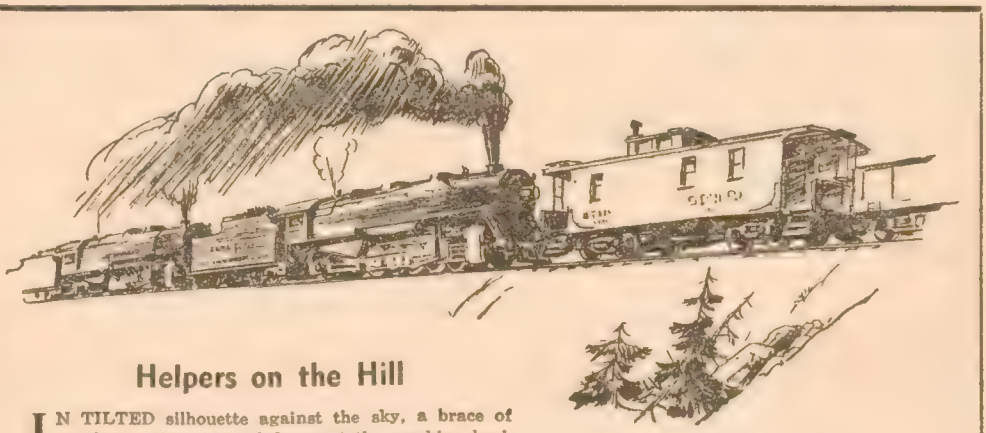
"Go with God," the *presidente* said with feeling.

"Remain with God," Kane answered, and shuddered again as he saw a *cargador* boarding the long *garay* with that dynamite.

Getting Daniel-Come-to-Judgment aboard was a task. Letting the Bishop take his jack-rabbit sized horse was just too much, but the precedent had been established, months previous, when, fully intending to leave Mindanao with his wife-to-be and her father, Kane had ferried across, below Kolumbugan, with the Bishop guiding him to the plane which had taken Diane to Australia.

So the embarkation was delayed longer than Kane liked. He was too squeamish to be a commander. Imagining the meeting of those dying Moros and the counterattacking Japs—imagining the square impact of bullet or shell fragment against a case of dynamite a man was shouldering—the more he saw of this business, the less heart did he have for planning. Why couldn't they have left him where he belonged, inventing ways and means, rather than watching the grim working out?

The square sails rose. The *garay* stood out to sea, her outriggers making a phosphorescent wake. Coast Moros navigated; the men from the interior began setting their cargo in order, for she listed.



Helpers on the Hill

IN TILTED silhouette against the sky, a brace of pusher engines blast defiance at the creaking hack ahead. But for their hundred thousand pounds of added tractive effort, the big-barrelled mill a mile across the tops would lose her feet upon the hill, tying up a vital link in America's longest assembly line.

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The admiral raised the pair of beer bottles which were taped together to simulate binoculars.

The skipper, Datu Hussayn, bawled instructions until she rode on an even keel. Datu Ryan's honorary admiral, and the others who used to pilot the ferry across the river at the crackpot Irishman's plantation, were having all fun and no work.

They had not the foggiest idea on navigation. But the admiral, wearing his cocked hat, raised to his eyes the pair of beer bottles which Ryan had taped together to simulate binoculars.

"Hard a port! Luff, you sons of——! Avast there!" All in good English, not a word of which he understood. And his barge crew solemnly answered, "Aye, aye, sir! Hold her as she is!"

They would not be much use until they got on land and had a chance to use the cutlasses which Ryan had found for them in a Chinese salvage store in Manila, years previous.

Kane tried to ignore the blazing villages which reddened the coast line. Innocent bystanders had caught hell. "My bright idea, too."

Then he heard the drone of a plane. The *garay*, he knew, must be visible from the air, if only because of the glow of the coastal villages, though the phosphorescent wake also betrayed her.

And then, momentarily silhouetted, a small, lean ship appeared on the starboard bow. A Jap patrol; nothing else steamed in these waters. Whether destroyer, or gunboat, or armed transport, he could not guess. But Kane now understood why Ximenes had drawn a long face, upon hearing of the proposed raid.

"Do something, even if it's wrong, at least do *something*!" he repeated bitterly. "Well, I went and did it."

Military maxims, it seemed, were not to be taken too literally. And when, confessing error, he asked Ximenes for suggestions, the lieutenant sighed and shrugged. "Sir, you are the commander. Me, I do not have naval experience. But judging from what is too visible now, that boat has guns."

CHAPTER III

BATTLE STATIONS!

KANE could judge from the silhouette only that the approaching vessel did have guns. And then blackness swallowed her up, for she was no longer in line with the glow of a village.

The private *garay* had dark sails, but the plane overhead could pick her wake. The combination worried him: aerial spotting, with a fast surface enemy. The *garay* could outrun a transport, or the average gunboat; even now, she shuddered and pounded from her speed, and she was far from under full sail. But a destroyer would be something else.

What really played hell was the parachute flare which the plane dropped. A blue white blaze spread over the Min-

danao Sea. And then a searchlight reached out, though its beam became invisible in the area directly under the floating flare.

The Moros were putting the *lantakas* into place, their pintles seated in massive thwarts of hardwood. They chanted as they worked, and did not seem worried. Ryan's burlesque admiral was at the forepeak. Kane remained on the poop. This was the worst case of divided command he had ever imagined, for the Moro skipper, a grim little man with snaggled black teeth, was really running the show.

All Kane could say was, "I wish that damn Ryan was here with his four stars." And then Kane realized that Ryan had not told him to raid a Jap camp, so he gathered all the misery to his own head.

The skipper said, "We cannot outrun her. What is your order?"

Kane stopped sweating and began to freeze, particularly when Ximenes gave him an inquiring look. The parachute flare was dimming now, and the searchlight got its innings.

A shell howled overhead, and blew up a geyser of white water, a quarter of a mile off the port bow. Apparently the Skibbies were not quite sure whether the *garay* was one impressed into their freight service, or whether it was loaded with guerillas escaping from shore.

Then Kane spoke: "Fight the sons of ——s! We can't outrun them."

The skipper nodded. That was logical. After all, men of his blood had, less than a century ago, sailed their ships 800 miles to Manila, had stormed the fortified city; with little more than *barong* and *kampilan* they had charged the Spanish cannon. Though driven off, finally, with heavy losses, the Moro pirates had never been forgotten. Nothing was impossible to these tough little sea raiders—but Kane told himself that they probably had never bucked the five-inch rifles of an armed boat.

"*Aywah,* we fight the sons of lewd mothers!" he bawled at the men who manned the little brass *lantakas.* His voice crackled with pride as he added, "Load with iron shot!"

An unheard of luxury! The Moro cannoneers usually used laboriously hand-hewn stones, or cannisters of junk and scrap iron. They were calm because their commander was conferring with the man who had made powder for them, and showed them how to cast round balls, dozens of them. Ryan's admiral began brandishing his cutlass. Riflemen crouched at the bulwarks with their captured Mitsuis, bayonets fixed.

And cannoneers lighted punks, ready to touch off the priming charge. Others had grappling irons, and ropes of rattan. The enemy was low in the water, but moving fast.

Another shot, this time for business. It pounded through the poop, scattering splinters of kemagon.

The *lantaka* that could throw a ball more than 500 yards with anything resembling force or accuracy had never been cast. The Japs was six times that distance away, Ximenes reckoned. And the five-inch shell was just a sample.

Kane saw all this in a matter of seconds, for every man had fallen to a task at once; it was all moving quickly, though it seemed like a slow motion nightmare to the unwilling commander. Then he said, and without any conscious reasoning, "Lower a *banca.* One on the windward—the starboard—oh, hell, on our left! Do you get it, *ya ra'as?* Or *nakhoda* or what?"

Ximenes grinned. "Call him *amir ul-bahr,* he'll be flattered."

"*Aywah!*" the skipper said, and shouted to the *serang,* who was busily preparing a chew of betel.

Kane's next order shocked Ximenes into freezing his grin. The lieutenant's mouth hung open when he heard, "Halt her, take down sail, make ready to surrender before we get blown out of the water."

The skipper began to choke. Kane went on, "So they'll quit shooting. While we sneak up with a *banca.*"

Everyone was happy. The skipper could have, surely would have thought of that ancient gag, but give a man a superior, and he quits thinking. At least, Japs and Germans quit.

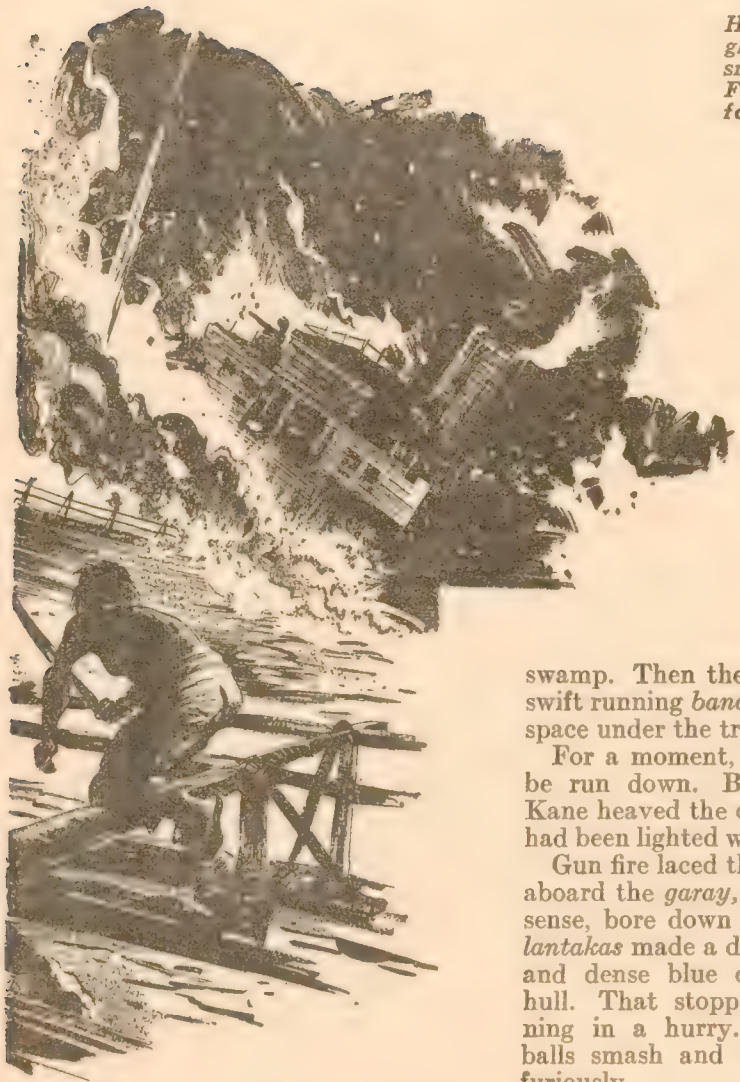
A bamboo rocket, charged with homemade powder went up. The squaresail dropped. The *garay* wallowed in the

swell, and there was no more bombardment. But the *banca* alongside was very busy, getting herself loaded with Kane's prime worry, two cases of dynamite, and some other odds and ends which the Bishop had salvaged for future "damolition" work. Then came a scramble with rope, and cans of gunpowder, and some waterproof fuse. Lengths of bamboo, fully six inches in diameter, furnished floats.

All this was done on the side furthest from the searchlight, and as the enemy came nearer, her beam converged, so that the *banca* was able to slip out into darkness before getting clear of the hull.

Kane went with her crew. The approaching enemy was moving at lower speed. Side glare of the searchlight gave him details; her armament was deck guns and anti-aircraft, with a few machine guns. An armed transport, light draft, and speedy; plenty to settle any *garay*, but vulnerable herself.

HER lookout and skipper were concentrating on the seventy-foot *garay*, dead ahead. But that was too good to last. The *vinta* swerved. Spray



He could see the ruddy glare of the explosion and smell the petroleum fumes. Fire had started in the forepeak of the transport.

drenched Kane, blinded him. Moros, scrambling like apes, rode the outriggers, moving inboard or outboard, according as her trim demanded. Then she shot across the bow of the transport. But that was pushing luck to the limit.

Though not directly in the searchlight pencil, she was picked up by scattering rays. A machine gun chattered, and tracers lashed the water. "Heave," Kane yelled, he touched a light to the waterproof fuse, and watched the improvised mine go over.

The *banca* swerved crazily, kicking spray to her masthead. Kane paid out the line, and wondered when she'd swamp. Then the firing ceased, for the swift running *banca* was now in the dead space under the transport's bow.

For a moment, it seemed that they'd be run down. But she made it, and Kane heaved the other mine, whose fuse had been lighted with the first one.

Gun fire laced the bulwarks. Someone aboard the *garay,* with more spirit than sense, bore down with the punks. The *lantakas* made a dull, draggling thunder, and dense blue clouds hid the entire hull. That stopped the machine gunning in a hurry. He heard the iron balls smash and pound the deckhouse furiously.

By now, the Japs were convinced that treachery was afoot, and that the surrender had been a trick to get so close that the deck guns could not be depressed enough for a hit. But the machine gunners raked the *garay* with stem to stern. Tracers made a long, colored fan of flame.

The *lantakas* cut loose again. Kane, swinging in a wide arc, was well beyond the zone of danger, though the air was thick with low-hanging, sulphurous fumes of his own powder. He shouted, "Those damn fools, why don't they make sail, they can't sink her!"

"Maybe the *nakhoda* will board her,"

one of the Moro optimists suggested.

Kane was afraid that something of the sort would be attempted. If Filipinos only had more sense and less courage!

Worse than that, he was afraid that his mine had failed.

Finally, he was now certain that the advancing transport, apparently bent on ramming the *garay*, would crush the mines against her side and blow her to splinters.

He began to see every possible fault with his improvised counterattack. If the raid at the crossroads had been crackpot, this was worse. He forgot entirely that hardly anything could have been worse than being blown out of the water by five-inch rifles, or being captured as a sea-guerilla.

Worst of all, he had set out to take the most dangerous post, and now he was safe in a getaway boat so small and fast that he could name his destination and settle down for a nap.

There were no more broadsides from the *garay*. Either the skipper had wisely abandoned ship, or else the entire crew had been machine gunned.

Then he heard a voice which rolled and thundered across the water, now that the machine guns had subsided. Bishop Jackson was singing *Ole Man 'Ribber'*. It reminded Kane of the night when, a refugee from the shelling of Davao, he had heard the Bishop, and could not believe that the jungle rang from an African voice.

He wondered if Daniel-Come-to-Judgment could swim ashore.

He wondered how many survivors there would be to curse him.

And to curse Datu Ryan for putting a surveyor in command.

Then a concussion knocked him flat on his face. Fish leaped out of the water and dropped in the bilge without flipping a fin. He felt, rather than heard the blast. But despite the searchlight, he could see the ruddy glare of the explosion. Whichever mine had let go first, the detonation wave of the dynamite had touched off the other.

The searchlight winked out. Fire had started in the forepeak of the transport. He smelled petroleum fumes; she carried a heavy cargo of fuel oil or gasoline, perhaps both. And that, he knew, would do more damage than the simultaneous blast of two cases of dynamite.

KANE boarded the *garay* under cover of cannon fire. The *lantakas* were booming again, hurling balls at the leaping flames dead abeam. And then her sail rose, and she swooped up the Mindanao Sea.

It was good, looking back at the ruddy splash. Ximenes said, "These damn Jap rifles, they shoot crooked, but I got that searchlight."

He found the Bishop. "How's your hoss?"

"Ain't even scratched, suh." There was a wrestling match, a pounding of hoofs. "Set still, Daniel-Come-to-Jedgment, de Lawd is taking care of you, quit yo' panicking!"

Half a dozen Moro cannoneers were buried at sea, when the sun rose. Hajji Maulana recited from the Koran. And then he gestured to Bishop Jackson. The Bishop said to Kane, "If they asks for speritual consolation, they gits it, otherwise they don't."

Which was why the founder of the Evangelical Mission of the Pagan Tribes of Mindanao had survived forty years in the field.

As for Kane, he saw no chance of being deprived of command. Fire-gutting a Jap transport, even though the job netted not a piece of loot, appealed to the old heads. Some of them had waylaid sailing ships in the Sulu Sea, in the great days of piracy, but this was their first attack against steam.

Kane, however, was worried. "Two dumb tricks in a row, and getting away with it by the grace of God," he said to Ximenes, as they sat down to their pot of rice. "I wish I were back at the nitrate beds and the iron forges."

Ximenes made as if to speak, but changed his mind. It was not until half an hour later, he regarded a small island from which the skipper had veered, and then said, "If you can invent a dumb trick at the rum distillery, my friend, please do so. We will pray."

"And what do you think I'll be doing?"

The *garay* darted in and out through a maze of islands as she headed northeast to avoid the gunboats which, after the alarm at Dalipuga, would be patroling the open Sulu Sea. Hajji Maulana dug into the pot of rice and said in his best schoolroom manner, "More than 6800 islands of area less than one square mile each. Finding us is not easy."

Ever since sunrise, Kane had tried a number of times to count the islands in sight, and had not once succeeded, for new ones constantly popping up confused the tally. Each had at least a handful of inhabitants, and along the shores, fishing hamlets were perched high on bamboo piles.

Long before the *garay* swung west and into the Visayan Sea, the leaks had been plugged and the rigging repaired. Finally the circuit ended in a cove on the northern shore of Panay. The sugar island's shape is roughly triangular, apex pointing southwest, with both sides outlined by mountain ranges; Capiz Province, in the north, makes the base. Kane's plan was to disembark somewhat west of Capiz Town, and then work inland, to approach his objective from the landward side.

CHAPTER IV

DON HILARIO

ONCE the *garay* was camouflaged, and her armament of *lantakas* hidden ashore, the guerillas worked their way through the jungle between the sea and the north coast highway. Hajji Maulana had reluctantly abandoned his red Moro skullcap, and like the others, he wore a wide brimmed straw hat. He missed his embroidered vest and red silk pants; but this gaudy Moro garb would have made him too conspicuous in Visayan Panay, so he put on white cotton trousers and a "*camisa de chino*". The shirt, flopping outside the pants, offered good concealment for his silver hafted *kris*.

Kane was too tall to disguise, and so was the Bishop.

"Gen'ral, suh, it looks like we-all is plumb useless fo' spying out de land," the head of the Pagan Church mourned. "Ain't even any heathens to convert or nothing."

Ximenes, now looking very much the *tao*, shook his head and grinned. "No, *señor obispo*," he said, ceremoniously. "There are plenty of heathens. Capiz Province is very Japanese."

"The hell it is!" Kane cut in.

Ximenes' brows rose. "You were not informed?"

"Someone played me a dirty trick. I refer to General Datu Ryan. What do you mean it's very Japanese?"

"The little yellow *cabrones* are thick as fleas in Capiz. Not as bad as Davao, but bad enough. They've married Filipina women, taken up land, evading the law. And now—well, with a Jap garrison in Capiz town, the Filipinos are hampered. The *presidentes*, the *alcaldes*, the schoolteachers, everyone of influence in the community, they have to co-operate."

Kane felt as though he had been kicked in the stomach. Guerilla warfare was difficult enough in Mindanao, where every Moro, every pagan, and every Christian on the island could be depended on to be a Jap-hater; here he had a really tough assignment. This was a deluxe problem in leadership. He shook his head, grimaced wryly, and then he remembered the 6800 tiny islands whose inhabitants hardly more than realized that there was a war. That the Japs had seized the main cities and a few provinces did not, after all, count; the cantankerous Filipino of the hinterland was the man who would finally decide things, and that man needed only leadership. So he said to Ximenes, "We'll have to skirt the Totocan Range, until we're some distance south, and scout around until we find an all-Filipino *barrio* we can work from. With that as a start, we'll feel out the country and approach the sugar central from the southern side—well away from the north coast highways."

As he spoke, he indicated the general directions on Hajji Maulana's road map. The lieutenant had no amendments to offer; and so, that night, the guerillas crossed Highway 1 somewhat west of Numancia, where stretches of tall cogon grass and jungle came very close to the

cultivated areas and to the *barrios* which lay south of the paved road.

They carried all their supplies and equipment, including the *lantakas*. As Kane saw it, the brass cannon would be of little use, certainly not enough to justify the labor of lugging them, slung from bamboo poles carried by porters; but there was the matter of morale. The men were eager to burn some more of the home-made powder, though for all their love of firearms, there was not one of the pack but who would not in a pinch, prefer to dive in with a *kris* and slice his way to a decision.

And for a while, Kane's raid simmered down to sweat and trail breaking, thorns and mosquitos. The one consolation he found from the situation was that the volcanic hills between him and the west coast offered, in case of a bad setback, good cover and ultimate escape.

There was a Japanese garrison in Capiz Town, estimated at something like a regiment. At least one battalion of this outfit was some seven miles inland, at Panay Town, and too close to the distillery. The network of paved roads favored the enemy, enabling them to turn out with motor convoys to intercept the guerillas when they retreated seaward after destroying the distillery. Added to the evils of open country was the infiltration of Japanese civilians in the various *barrios;* thus, unlike the situation in Mindanao, the raiders could not scatter, a few to each *barrio,* and mingle with the natives until, two or three at a time, they could slip away to meet at the rendezvous and embark for home.

Kane was playing it cautiously, much more so than Datu Ryan would have done. As he saw it, the expedition not only had to succeed, but it had to return with minimum losses.

"Our job," he said to Ximenes and Hajji Maulana, one evening in camp, "is to show that we can hit, hit hard, *and then get away.* Our getting away is not just a matter of saving our own hides and our few guns, it is to set an example to the civilians, encourage them."

"I've heard of such things before," Ximenes said, dryly.

Kane turned a deep red. "I imagine you have, lieutenant. But with all respect, a regular soldier is likely to think in large terms, and not at all of retreat." He twisted about to concentrate on the old school teacher. "And you Moros, Hajji—too much valor and not enough judgment in such matters."

"We do," he admitted, "enjoy a fight more for the fight than for the results. But I try to give your idea to the men."

THEY finally came to a tongue of jungle and lava outcropping which reached far into the central valley. Kane and the Bishop went to its very end. Kane's binoculars were strong enough to reach across the broad fields where men and women plied long bladed knives, and carabaos hauled cartloads of freshly cut and trimmed cane.

Each family worked its own hectares, but, Filipino fashion, lived in one of the *barrios* which dotted the valley floor. This aversion to isolated houses kept Kane from making his headquarters at the farm of some *tao* whose right-mindedness was beyond question, for while there were beyond doubt many planters who would welcome a raiding party, there was no such thing as privacy. Everyone knew everyone's business, and gossip circulated almost as fast as if transmitted by radio.

He handed the glasses to Bishop Jackson. "Your eyes are better than mine; you try it. Over there."

The Bishop, whose kinky hair had been grayed by something like sixty years, admitted that if a man read nothing but the Bible, and not too much of that, his eyes would profit. He adjusted the interpupillary distance, focused each eyepiece, and with a deftness amazing for his banana-sized fingers. Finally he said, "Them's Japs meandering around in that patch yonder. Two of 'em, with Filipina women and pickaninnies. They's old settlers."

"Huh! You can see their wrinkles?"

"Nawsuh, eyes ain't what they used to be, but you can tell from how he walk. And he got lots of chillun. Now me, I ain't got mo'n six or eight, account I'm away from home preaching, walking up an down de earth and in it."

Far off, toward the center of the valley, a narrow gauge train chugged along, drawing car after car of cane. There was a puff of steam, and seconds later, the peanut roaster shrilling of the whistle. To the north, Kane could just distinguish the tall smokestacks and the buildings of the central toward which the engine was drawing its dozen carloads of cane.

The following day's reconnaissance ended near one of the old fashioned mills which, despite the big central to the northeast, still remained in business. Not far from it was a small *barrio* which in all probability was inhabited by natives sufficiently conservative and tradition bound to be as free of Japanese influence as they were of modern efficiency.

"Too good to be true," Kane said, as he appraised the plant and the *barrio* through his glasses.

Ximenes had a ready answer: "Not really surprising. Over in Formosa, maybe thirty years ago, the Japs had a very difficult time persuading the planters to give up their wasteful little mills and supply the big centrals. They even had difficulty in getting them to plant the new 'Red Bamboo' strain, the one best for that climate, and having a much higher sugar yield."

"Mmm . . . well, those were Chinese planters in Formosa, mainly, weren't they? I mean, that used to be Chinese territory before the first piece of Japanese hijacking."

Ximenes nodded. "But of course. Yet our people are much like the Chinese. In being conservative. I refer to the farmers and planters. Suppose I go to the mill and look for work?"

Inasmuch as there was always a seasonal labor shortage, never entirely relieved by workers from Cebu and Negroes, Ximenes' pretext was plausible; more than that, there was little chance that he would be questioned.

"If things look right," Ximenes promised, "I'll bring the *patron* into the jungle to talk to you. Are you willing?"

Kane nodded. "If he looks good to you, it is O.K. by me. We can't be hiding in the bush forever."

So the lieutenant headed south, proposing to approach as though he had left some southern *barrio* where working conditions had proved uncongenial. Work of any kind, planters declared bitterly, was unpleasant to itinerants from the adjoining islands, since anyone who amounted to anything at all stayed home with his own kinfolk, to attend to his own business.

While lurking in cover, Kane had plenty of time to observe the old time routine for sugar making, the process which the Chinese introduced to the islands centuries ago. In some fields, men were ploughing, and others followed, planting the top-lengths from whose buds new stalks would sprout. But what most interested him was the mill itself.

A carabao circled about, operating the crusher; the setup was reminiscent of the horse-powered hay presses which once roved from field to field, back in the States. And the toothed rollers which carried on with the extraction of the juice were just as primitive; at least half the sugar remained in the *bagasse*, which was so moist that it had to be spread out in the sun to dry before it could be used to fire the pans.

He liked the molasses odor which the breeze brought him; it was thick with fumes from the six big pans which were shaded by an open shed, palm thatched. Men in shorts and *camisas de chino* worked on the long handled dippers which transferred the partly cooked syrup from one pan to the next in succession. Others stirred with wooden paddles.

Wasteful . . . unsanitary . . . but it cheered Kane. People who could take a loss rather than patronize the far more efficient central would also, if someone showed them the way, resist the New Order.

PRESENTLY the Bishop came along. "Gen'rul, suh, what do you think of them folks over yonder?"

"I hope they're right minded. But I'm leaving that to Ximenes. Nothing you and I can do, we're the wrong size and the wrong color."

The Bishop chuckled, then doubled

up with African laughter. "'Scuse me, suh, but I jest can't help laughing out loud. I been de wrong color all my life, and now I hear white folks is the wrong color. War is mighty funny. But I tell you what I can do, whilst we waits for a chance to convert some heathens."

"Let's hear it, Bishop."

"I can pray."

He took off his hat, and set it in front of him, alongside his belt and his Frontier Model .45; and this only after he had his back to a tree. The Bishop's years in Mindanao had taught him the evils of taking any chances while waiting for Divine guidance. . .

Somewhat after sunset, Ximenes came to camp with a little man who wore shoes, a Shantung suit, and a Buntal hat. In one hand he carried a jug, which he almost dropped in his amazement at seeing an American. He exclaimed, "*Señor* Winslow—" He squinted, smiled. "Pardon, but there is the resemblance."

Ximenes cut in, "This is the surprise, Don Hilario. And he likes rum as well as *Señor* Winslow. General, Don Hilario owns this sugar mill. His father and his grandfather and his great-grandfather owned it before him."

Kane accepted compliments, and returned them with what he hoped was equal elegance. Don Hilario poured tin cups of rum which he had cooked off in the pot still which fumed away in one corner of the rambling plant.

"*Salúd, Señor Général.*"

"To your own good health, Don Hilario."

By now Don Hilario had become accustomed to the *kris* and rifle-armed men who squatted about their smudge fires, though when he learned that they were Moros, he began to have doubts which he could hardly conceal. "There is no difference, these days, between a Moro and a Visayan," Kane assured him. "All Filipinos. Now, this *Señor* Winslow whom I resemble? If I may ask."

"But of course. He is a chemist who worked at the central. Making the tests on each load of cane." The old man shrugged. "Out here, we are old fashioned, we guess how much sugar each load has, and thus everyone is happy."

He refilled the mugs. The rum was smooth stuff, though it had the cigar-box tang of the mahogany cooperage in which it had been aged. Don Hilario, keen eyed, noted Kane's qualm on gulping the second shot, and said, "You like it when you are used to it. *Señor* Winslow noticed the taste of the cask, but soon he learned to like it."

"I like it already," Kane assured him. "Now, *Señor* Winslow?"

"The Japs kept all the experts locked up in the central. And made them work the still, the boilers, all the *chingaderas* they have in that enormous place. But he escaped into the hills."

This man would be valuable in giving him a detailed picture of the plant layout; Kane asked, "Where is he now? Do you see him often?"

"He takes no chances. The Japs are looking for him."

"How was he treated?"

"Well enough, I understand. But he did not want to work for the enemy. So he hides in the jungle, and lives on what he can find."

"How does the central affect your business, Don Hilario?"

"Bad. Though it is worse, now that one can't sell the *muscado* on the open market. But my grandfather built this mill, long before the Americano installed a central, and I run it. For the sentiment, you understand, though partly because it is such a long haul to Panay Town."

"How do the others, those with water power mills and steam power mills like the central?"

The old man shrugged. "It is not the competition, it is those *cabrones chinga'os*, the Japs! Now that there is only the market they offer, I can't sell to the Chino merchants. They liked this crude sugar better than the stuff from the central. More flavor, you comprehend."

He offered Kane a stick of molasses and coconut candy which had been poured to cool in a bamboo mould lined with palm leaves. "Try it, *mi général.* We can't sell, but we can eat."

It was not as sanitary or as daintily put up as a confection from the States,

but it was good, and Kane dug in. Finally, he carried on, "I take it that you and your neighbors out here do not have any Japanese in-laws?"

"*Zus-mario-sep!* No, praised be the holy saints!"

BIT by bit, Kane got the picture: Don Hilario's mill, though under Japanese pressure, still operated without any serious interference. His crude sugar went to the same brokers in Panay and Capiz as before; the only difference was that the output ended in Japanese hands. Eventually, they would close him out, so that he and the neighboring planters would have to haul their crops to the central. In all probability, no one would lose by the change, since the old-fashioned mill left nearly half the juice extracted. But there was the matter of sentiment and tradition.

"So it would be simple enough, just having the carts go to the narrow gauge line instead of coming here?"

"Precisely. Some of my growers already do that. A few. Because it is a shorter haul."

"Do any go directly to the central with their carts, instead of taking their crop to the narrow gauge?"

"*Seguramente.* There is an unloader for carts, as well as cars."

Ximenes caught Kane's eye, got an answering nod, and took up the argument: "Then good, Don Hilario! We—all of us—are going to make a study of the sugar business. Provided we can hide ourselves under the loads of cane. The central operates day and night, I understand."

"That is right, *Señor Teniente.* But I think it would be better, with so many men, to go ride the narrow gauge."

Kane said, "Only a few will go into the central. The others will wait outside. Getting in is not as hard as getting away when we have done our work. Now what do you say?"

Don Hilario closed his eyes for a moment. "A train moves when it moves itself. A cart moves when one prods the carabao. There is more control of time. If a train had few stops, it would arrive, say, by daylight, and the unloading might progress a little too well."

"That," Kane admitted, "would be embarrassing. So I leave it to you to arrange for planters to drive to the central. Now that you can trust us, could you get word to *Señor* Winslow?"

Don Hilario threw up his hands. "But it is the truth, *mi général*—I do not know where he is, he takes no chances. We did not know him well; we remember him because he was *muy simpatico.* Maybe he feels that he would put us in danger if he came down to get food and some rum."

"It would do just that," Kane agreed. "And if we can't get word of him, we'll just pick our way as we originally intended."

They did not get any word of the hidden chemist, and after checking Don Hilario's statements against what Ximenes had observed in his scouting in the neighborhood of the sugar central, Kane disposed his guerillas.

Hajji Maulana was to mine the bridge between Panay Town and the central; when the show opened, the blast would be touched off, and the Jap soldiers hurrying from the garrison would have to park their trucks and proceed afoot. The lurking guerillas were then to use their judgment: if necessary, they would harass the Japs who crossed the river, or else head for the hills and thus lead the enemy away from the embarkation point.

Finally, in case of serious upsets, such as being cut off from the waiting *garay,* all members would head for the hills and meet in the jungle at the foot of Mt. Totocan.

Kane said, "Hajji, if anything goes wrong at the central, I am depending on you to get the men home, someway. You are a Moro, they are Moros, you will get them back."

"If Allah wills. But the *lantakas,* won't we use them? The men are anxious to try them out."

Kane shook his head. "Three of us will slip into the central, set the distillery on fire, and do whatever damage we can. Shelling the central wouldn't do any good. We need much larger guns for that. And I'm not sure that *lantakas* would stop the Japs as well as blowing

up the bridge. Remember, don't blow it up until the show opens."

Hajji Maulana swore by the Koran and by the Prophet that he would carry out his orders to the letter. He picked up his map and took command of the main body.

Kane turned to Ximenes and the Bishop: "Three of us can sabotage the distillery. And without dynamite. Unfortunately, we used most of it when we disposed of that transport off Dalipuga."

"We started out without any dynamite," Ximenes said, "so we're no worse off. But may I ask why Hajji takes the covering detachment?"

Kane answered, "It would have been better to let you lead it. But slipping into the central is a ticklish job. We'll have to move fast when we get going. Hajji is a good schoolteacher. You are more scientific. With a lot to do, and no time to do it in, you can raise more hell in that tangle of piping and engines and pumps than he could."

That satisfied the lieutenant.

The Bishop did not particularly care where he went. His only worry centered on Daniel-Come-to-Judgment. He had to trust his horse to Hajji Maulana's party. Yet he was philosophical about it. "If de Lawd don't get us'ns outen de central, it's jest asking too much to expect him to look out for a hoss. And if'n we do our job and get out, it's reasonable to think that a hoss'll be looked out for."

CHAPTER V

FAILURE OF A MISSION

TWO days later, Don Hilario had arranged for five loads of sugar cane to go to the central. The starting point, and the hour of departure were so arranged that the cargo would arrive near dusk. The Bishop was concealed under one load, Ximenes under another, and Kane under a third; the extra carts were to lend size to the procession, and to give Don Hilario certain flexibility of motion, once the carts were within the enclosure. The time required to weigh in and unload the leading cart would give the concealed saboteurs their chance to pick the right moment for emerging from cover and finding a hiding place.

The six-foot stalks were stacked lengthwise. Holes bored in the hand-hewn planks of the cart bed admitted enough air to prevent absolute suffocation, though as time wore on, Kane began to have his doubts.

Axles creaked. The load shook down as the carabaos plodded along, making a trifle over two miles an hour. This wasn't a hayride. Kane was closer to stifling than he had ever imagined. He lost all track of time, and finally, in the hope of getting a little more air, he worked his way toward the side, where he would be as well concealed and yet get a bit of ventilation.

No dynamite. No incendiary bombs. Absolutely nothing but bare hands, matches, and optimism. But high proof alcohol does not require a blow torch to touch it off. The job was not hopeless; quite the contrary, Kane told himself as he sweated, and twisted about, and gaped like a fish out of water during those endless hours of bouncing across the sun-blasted central valley.

Really simple—just a matter of endurance, he told himself. The sun is setting; it won't be long now. . . And then, within smelling distance of the central, he heard the sound of a motorcycle, and saw the sidecar which was approaching. A second trailed it, bouncing along over a freshly cut field.

Four Japs were heading for the carabao train. Kane could not make out their insignia; one, apparently, was an officer, whereas the second bike and sidecar carried enlisted men, since the rider in the side car held two rifles.

They had just cleared a patch whose feathery tops swayed in the breeze; a dense and disorderly mass of third or fourth *ratoon*, impenetrable as the worst of Mindanao's jungle. First growth sugar cane, planted in precise rows, develops into a brake which is far from good going; the second growth, cropping up after the first has been cut, is worse, since the stalks wander out of alignment. And each succeeding *ratoon* becomes more dense, though yielding less sugar per acre.

Kane did not know what was on the other side of the cart. He did not know what Ximenes and the Bishop were seeing, doing, or thinking. That a Jap patrol would bounce and jolt over a cut field, heading directly for a carabao train, could hardly be coincidental.

Too late, he realized that in putting a man to a cart had been so conservative that now, in a pinch, he could not communicate with them. Axle creak, and motorcycle racket kept him from calling. Anything loud enough for Ximenes to hear and pass on to the Bishop would reach the Japs.

The procession halted when one cycle swooped toward the leading cart. The Jap officer said in Spanish, good Spanish at that, "We wish to inspect your loads."

The other cycle was now at the tail of the procession, so that there was no slipping out on the further side.

Don Hilario's answer was somewhat louder than necessary, and he spoke much more slowly than he usually did. "With much pleasure, *Señor Teniente.* But is it permitted to ask why our crop interests you?"

The tone suggested that the old man had doffed his hat, and was making ceremonious bows and gestures. Kane did not mind the odds, as such, but he feared that when three guerillas were discovered, Don Hilario would, regardless of alibis, be backed against a stone wall. Something must have slipped. Perhaps a Filipino traitor had trailed Ximenes or Hajji Maulana from their spying in town. Heading right for this one of all the hundreds of carabao carts in Capiz Province was a mighty sweaty business.

THEN the Jap officer answered, amiably enough, "It is very well permitted. Do you mean to say you have not heard the orders?"

"I come somewhat of a distance, *Señor Teniente.*" A pause. "*Por alla.*"

Kane wished that he could have seen the gesture which accompanied the final words; "from over yonder" covered a lot of ground, and the supposed point of origin might be useful to know.

"Then listen. We look for one Abrán Ortega. He has been smuggling food to an American engineer who escaped from the central. We trailed him to this cane field. He could not have gone through it—it is too dense. He is not among the laborers working the patch beside it. We suspect that he loitered among them until he could hide himself in one of your wagons. Have your men unload."

"But it is late, *Señor Teniente,*" Don Hilario protested. "The central will close, the gates, that is, for the wagon unloading, you comprehend. My men have seen nothing." He raised his voice. "Is it not so, Gregorio? Hernán? Pacifico?"

The carabao drivers were answering, "That is so, *patrón!*" But the final two were interrupted. The lieutenant said, not so amiably, "Enough of this! The sooner you get to work, the sooner you can begin to load up again. Quick, now!"

Bad as the situation was, it cheered Kane to know that Abrán Ortega, whoever he might be, was sufficiently partisan to Americans to risk smuggling food to Winslow.

The men fell to, and presently, the cart was unloaded. The lieutenant commanded, "Try the last one, that is the one he should pick."

Officer and noncom stalked down the line to supervise the work. The latter had a drawn pistol. Kane relaxed. The Japs might call it a day when they found that the fifth cart contained no fugitive. Kane was in the middle; Ximenes was ahead, and the Bishop was behind—the fourth, that is.

And it was from the fourth that a gun bellowed—the lusty roar of a .45. The noncom whirled, jerked a shot into the hub of the six foot wheel, then doubled up. The officer yelled, flung himself into the drainage ditch which paralleled the road; and he moved rapidly enough to make the Bishop's second blast miss.

The enlisted men came racing from the tail of the caravan. Kane wriggled and twisted under his weight of stalks, and popped a shot at them, but did not score, for they found cover in the ditch. There was no understanding the jabber of Japanese, but the logic of the situation gave Kane a plausible translation:

to wit, one man was to cover the field on the further side of the train, to pot the fugitive if he tried to bolt; the other was to cover the near side.

Meanwhile, Don Hilario and his teamsters had scattered. The carabaos, while not high strung, were surly and cantankerous; the noise, the powder fumes, the very odor of fight inflamed them. They took off in varying directions, and each at his own pace, the unloaded cart making the best time and the most erratic course.

Kane's cart headed for the ditch. The shaft snapped, and a collar fastening yielded. The Jap officer scuttled away to avoid being buried by the impending discharge of cargo. But the cart did not tip. The carabao, now free, ploughed the earth for a dozen yards, and put about, his tiny eyes agleam, his head down. He snorted, gathered himself for a charge. Since there was a fight, thoroughly crazy goings on, he could play as well as anyone.

Then Kane saw Don Hilario dart from the further side of the stalled cart. He had a machete with a thirty-inch straight blade which flared out at the end, and into a sort of hook—the standard knife used in the fields.

The Japs were soldiers and they were fighters; they had less than the average person's fear of gun fire. But a charging carabao is something else; the snorting, the pounding hooves, the crescent shaped horns, thicker at the base than a man's arm—that was something else. A bit of coolness, a single shot, and there would be beef for supper; no hunter would consider it even minor sport, for the carabao has neither the speed nor the ferocity of his cousin the *seladang*, who goes out to hunt tigers when he's in a peevish mood. But these Japs were not hunters. They fired wildly as they scrambled.

AND Don Hilario leaped in with his knife, using it with all the Filipino's instinct for steel at close quarters. Kane had to hold his fire. Somewhere, a pistol whacked, a note different from the Bishop's long barreled Colt.

Three carts were overturned. One, empty, clattered cross country. The fifth, shedding cargo at every jounce, was getting up speed. Then a motorcycle sputtered, and Ximenes yelled, "*Puting'n'mo!* Get the——!"

He snatched a rifle dropped in the scramble, leveled it, lowered it; he saw the mud just as the Bishop cried, "Watch de muzzle, suh! You blow yo' head off!"

A young man in the remains of seersucker pants and coat crawled out of a heap of stalks. He bowed ceremoniously. "I am Abrán Ortega, who kisses the hands of your Excellencies. I am very sorry to have caused this trouble."

"Think nothing of it," Kane cut in. "Ximenes, grab that cycle, you and the Bishop, and get the hell away, quick! See if you can pull Hajji from the bridge and salvage the dynamite."

"But the Japs," Ximenes yelled, pointing toward the distillery. "That *cabrón*, the one that got away, he's looping toward the central to get the guards. They've heard the shooting anyway!"

They stripped the officer and the two soldiers of their weapons. Ximenes was charging across a cut field. The Bishop blew through the barrel of a Jap rifle and flattened out behind a cart. Kane snatched another gun, and handed young Ortega a pistol.

"Give Hilario a chance to get out with his drivers!" he shouted. "Raise hell for a few minutes, then dive into that second *ratoon* over there. We can't go fast, but they can't go any faster!"

But the old planter said, "*Señor*, I am now an outlaw. I go with you. They know who I am."

"Then dive for the cane patch!"

He opened up with his captured rifle. The Jap guards, pouring out of the distant central, began to deploy when his slugs kicked up dirt about them. At that range and in that light, he could not hope to score any hits, but making the enemy scatter would delay their advance. "Get going, Bishop!"

The big Negro suspended fire and took after Don Hilario and the carters, but half way to cover, he flattened out. Kane, jamming in a fresh clip, heard the measured *whack-whack-whack* of the Bishop's rifle. Despite light and

range, he was scoring; he paused to shout, "Get a move on, suh! I'se holding 'em!"

So Kane made a dash.

Thus, leapfrogging, the two reached the patch. Well in its depths, they heard Don Hilario and his drivers hacking their way through. Kane gasped, "Bishop, you made that rifle sound like a Chinese New Year—how in hell did you manage to hit anything?"

"Huh! Even a Jap man is fo'teen-sixteen inches wide, and he's twenty-fo' inches fum hip to collar bone, and no matter how poor a gun you got, you can hit a space that size. Ef'n yo' eyes is good and yo' ain't scairt. Ain't nothing to it, suh."

"That's a very simple recipe for soldiering, Bishop."

Don Hilario was quite sparing with his knife. Just a slash here, a slash there; enough to help the fugitives, but hardly enough to help the pursuers when they picked up the trail. And now, under the thick leaves of the twelve foot stalks, it was dark, a stifling, sultry darkness.

There was no firing, and the men who tore and twisted, crawled and bucked their way after Don Hilario heard no shouts. It seemed that the Japs had decided against barging into this dense growth. Though the patch was only a few hundred yards wide, it was over a mile long, unbroken except for half obliterated cart tracks which divided it into great squares.

Then Kane heard the roar and the crackle behind him.

"The sons of——s have set 'er on fire!"

Don Hilario began to ply his knife in earnest; so did the younger men. They swung into a cart track, where the growth was not quite so dense. But despite that advantage, danger raced after them. The stalks, juice laden, would not burn, but the flame stripped the dry leaves. The blaze had all the fury of a grass fire; a ceiling of fire rippled over the patch.

Kane drew his *barong* and slashed frantically. Sometimes he could advance a dozen yards by bucking the tangle. Then he would trip, flounder in a maze of stalks which had buckled under their own weight. Again, where they grew bud to bud, he had to cut and hew. Don Hilario looked up. "Wind—driver—sparks—away from us—not to us—thank God and Holy Saints—"

A blast cut him short; a distant rumbling, but at the moment no one had time for speculation.

They came to a cart trail which, compared to what they had traversed, was clear going. They emerged in darkness and headed for the hills; there had not been enough Japs to make a cordon about the blazing patch, and slipping past the patrols was simple business for guerillas.

CHAPTER VI

NEW STRATEGY

WHEN Kane reached the hills, Ximenes was waiting with Hajji Maulana's detachment; they had concealed the motorcycle in a fifth *ratoon*. The old schoolteacher said, "When we saw the flames, I dynamited the bridge. This was before *el Teniente* came up on the cycle. By Allah, we nearly shot him before we saw that he was not a Jap."

Another chimed in, "More than that, an army truck was coming, with soldiers. They did not like the blast."

"Everything," Kane told them, "was grand. Except that we're all out of dynamite now, we've got the whole province up in the air, and they'll have a whole company posted at the central from now on."

He suspected that the truck load of troops, rolling along just as the flames from the cane patch completed the deception which had put Hajji on the alert, had been another detachment setting out to hunt for Abrán Ortega. The young Visayan confirmed the guess. "It was bad in Panay. A friend warned me that I was suspected, but I barely got away, and not even a chance to dress like a planter or a *tao*."

"Well, you're a guerilla now whether you like it or not," Kane told the kid.

"*Señor*, I think I like it. Maybe *Señor* Winslow will also like it."

The Bishop cut in, "Seems to me he jest as well might, y'all won't be toting him no vittles for some time to come."

Ximenes came to the point: "*Mi général,* what do we do now? Without even scouting, I know that a battalion, maybe a regiment has come from Capiz, and that those *cabrones* will have a squad to stand by whenever a cart is unloaded, or a flat-car either. No one will sneak into the central now!"

Kane's face lengthened. "Pal, we are on a limb. But I'll think. I'll send a courier to Datu Ryan."

The Moro cannoneers came up in a group. We beg to represent," they began, "that we can sneak up with the *lantakas,* all charged. We can heat balls in a small, covered charcoal fire. Then, all at once, we fire into the distillery, red hot balls, and it burns."

Kane called for further details. While the suggested approach was not impossible, it presented too many risks; nevertheless, he went into a huddle with the gunners. Since there was time enough, he could well afford to let them enjoy the luxury of debate, betel nut chewing, interminable spitting, and grave pondering. He finally said, "It could be done as you say. But we would lose the *lantakas.* We do not have enough rifles to cover a slow retreat."

"That is true."

Kane went on, "There is another way to do the same work, and not risk the *lantakas.* If that way fails, then use them."

This compromise satisfied everyone, an important consideration in a group of individualists; but best of all, no one's dignity had been affronted, for he had listened to an hour's debate instead of turning the idea down at once.

Kane's plan for the ultimate destruction of the distillery was based on strategy which, while simple in principle, required careful planning and patience. He explained to Ximenes: "While we were caught under suspicious circumstances, approaching the central, the Japs don't know that destroying it is the entire object of our party. Hajji's mistake in blowing up a bridge will tend to make them think that a campaign of general hell raising is under way. Now, if we can keep that up, they'll scatter their vigilance, and finally, we'll pull them away from the central. And we'll nail it, while they're chasing trouble elsewhere."

THE first move was to make a camp from which they could retreat to the west coast which was less than ten miles distant; at the same time, scouts went down into the valley to find out just what the natives and the Japs thought of the previous day's incidents. And while these things were going on, young Ortega brought the fugitive sugar chemist to camp.

Winslow was tall, rangy, about Kane's height; normally, he would have been a bit heavier, but exposure and short rations had cut him down to skin and bones. His ribs were quite plainly seen through the tatters of his shirt; his cheeks were sunken, and he was red-eyed but he could still grin.

"They watched us like hawks," he said, "so we never had a chance to throw a wrench into the works. We had to produce, or else. At first I was sorry I had to make the break alone—I mean leave alone, because Ortega helped me, of course—but damn if it doesn't look as if the boys locked up in the central have the best of the deal."

Kane chuckled. "Don't want to go back, do you?"

"I don't! Things look much different already. Say, but you've got a lot of rifles—at least every third man seems to have one. How'd you do it?"

"We got our start sneaking up and cutting sentries down. Bushwhack small patrols. Yesterday, we gained two rifles."

"The old bit by bit, eh? Sounds like fun."

"Let them give you some chow, and then you can tell me about the layout of the central—by the way, what do you know about locomotives? Can you run one?"

"After a fashion. Lumber camps, you know."

"Then you may get a chance before long. Or tell me how."

When the guerilla spies returned, Kane learned that the Japs had brought

a battalion from Capiz, that the central was heavily guarded, and that the unloading of carabao carts and flatcars was now under strict supervision. Don Hilario's *barrio* had been burned, and several villagers had been shot as an example. Also, the dynamiting of the bridge had put the Japs pretty much on edge.

Kane asked Ximenes, "How can we make them think that there is a body of organized troops in the hills?"

The lieutenant considered the question. "With no uniforms, except yours and mine, we have to work in the dark, and we must not have any casualties. But good control of rifle fire can give the effect. Clean, crisp volleys from ambush, for instance. And then, good distribution of fire. Each man is assigned a definite target. A marching column, it is covered from end to end, evenly, all at once—quite different from haphazard sniping by individuals, no matter how accurately they shoot."

"What do you think you can do with these fellows?"

Ximenes shrugged. "I don't know. They're not bad shots, when you consider that instead of range practice, they've had nothing but 'dry' shooting, trigger squeeze and the like. The worst of it is, if the enemy finds empty Japanese cartridges when they get to the line we've abandoned, they'll smell a rat."

"I hadn't thought of that. Still, the last regulars in the field, before the surrender, were down to five rounds per man, and if they had any chance of salvaging enemy guns, they'd surely have done so."

Ximenes conceded that point, and set to work selling the rifle armed portion of the Moros the idea that fire discipline had a particular value, and that hand to hand work, regardless of good opportunities, was strictly out of order. He divided the men into squads of twelve, and drilled them in firing at command.

It did not take them long to catch on. Soon the click of a dozen cocking pieces made a single sound.

The test came several days later, when, after a night march, Ximenes and Kane posted the three squads along a

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wooded ridge. The lieutenant paced off the range, some three hundred yards. Then a barricade of rocks and logs was thrown across the highway, right at a turn whose curvature concealed the obstacle until an approaching vehicle was almost upon it.

The Japs, posting sentries at all bridges, made the rounds to relieve the old guard; this fixed routine gave the guerillas their chance.

FROM the height of the ridge, Kane commanded a view of the road. His hands trembled, so that he had considerable difficulty with his binoculars. This was different from previous bits of bushwhacking. The result depended on precision; and then there was the day-

A man pitched from the cab. Another crumpled up as he reached the broad shoulder. Rifles whacked.

light getaway. He envied the ease and calmness with which Ximenes went down the line, checking the sight setting of every rifle, giving each man a final reminder.

At last he saw the truck. He licked his dry lips and croaked, "Here they are!"

The vehicle was jammed with soldiers. They looked like khaki-clad puppets. The effect was enhanced when, still far from the ambush, the truck pulled up at a bridge. A noncom and a relieving sentry approached the man on post. There was the business of turning over orders. The noncom gestured, as if to point out the scene of some suspicious circumstance which the old guard had described.

They seemed to pay no attention to the ridge. Kane relaxed, and announced, "They're on the move again."

Ximenes was now crouching behind the middle squad; his nostrils flared, his brow beetled more than ever. The truck swung around the curve; it braked down.

"First squad, ready?"

"Ready," the men answered.

The khaki colored mass began to surge as men moved toward the sides and the tailgate.

"Take aim! . . . Fire!"

It was a crisp volley. Kane saw the impact of a few slugs, which kicked up chips of paving; but there were good hits the full length of the truck. Then the

second squad cut loose; a bit ragged from the tension of waiting, yet creditable. The third squad poured lead into the survivors, who were scrambling for cover. A man pitched from the cab. Another crumpled up as he reached the road shoulder. Rifles whacked; the enemy fire, however, was wild and harmless, for they had not yet recovered from the shock of surprise, and they had only a general idea of the source of the punishment which had mowed down half their number.

"Cease firing!"

There was a strained, sullen silence until one of the Moros grumbled, "*Teniente,* we can kill the rest of them —it is easy, then we get their guns."

"No more firing! Remember what I told you. Now get out!"

And they followed him down the further slope, and along the well chosen line of retreat. There was no Jap pursuit; there was no loot, but then, there had not been any casualties, and the expenditure of cartridges had been trifling.

By the time they reached camp, the Moros had begun to see the merits of combat by remote control. It was pretty flat and lacking in thrills, but there was, after all, a certain appealing humor to the picture of the Jap survivors blazing away at an evacuated ridge.

"What do you think, Ximenes?"

The lieutenant answered, "If we can do it often enough, we worry hell from them. But whether we make them believe we are a handful of regular soldiers —who knows what a Jap will think?"

On the next raid, twenty odd Moros armed with cane knives caught an ambushed patrol from the rear, popping up from cover while the third rifle volley still echoed and the Japs were beginning to return the fire. While there were guerilla casualties this time, there was also considerable loot. Ximenes explained to the raiders, "You see how it is? Using cane knives makes it look as if planters and *taos* are joining up with a handful of regular soldiers. We kill only a few, but we worry many hundreds."

That the strategy was effective was proved by reports brought in by spies, and by native suspects who fled from reprisal. Presently, there came news of small, none too skillfully conducted "outrages" in quarters not covered by Kane's party. The use of knives instead of *krisses* had made the local population believe that some of their fellows were hitting back at the invaders, and thus natives of the province were actually getting into the game of stalking sentries.

Ximenes ended by stealing an army truck, loading it with Moro riflemen, a few of whom were in Jap uniforms. By this deception, they came close enough to an enemy mess shack to hose it with several brisk volleys and make good their escape.

KANE was not surprised when Jap planes reconnoitered over the guerilla-infested hills. In fact, he had expected this move, and had prepared for it by building shelters, not too perfectly concealed, and distributed over enough ground to suggest that he had more than a battalion of troops. He furthered the deception by lighting mosquito smudges and cooking fires at night; always fairly but never too well concealed.

The Jap reconnaissance was followed by low altitude bombing and machine gunning of the dummy camp. For two hours, the hill shuddered under the blasts.

Kane, listening to the scream of bomb fragmentation and the whine of ricocheting bullets, grinned as he saw his strategy working out. "They think we're important," he said to the Bishop and Hajji Maulana. "The only slip will be if they send ground troops to clean us out, and pick a time when we can't double around to hit the distillery."

"I done got a revelation last night, suh," the Bishop said. "They ain't craving to meet us'ns in this here jungle and hills, not unless they has to."

The second day's bombing was marked by a freak of marksmanship. Two Moros, rebelling against Ximenes' discipline, blazed away at a low flying plane; it crashed.

"And that, *mi général,*" Ximenes grumbled, "is the end of fire discipline. You'll never make those fools believe it

was pure luck! They'll be wasting ammunition every time a plane flies over, and there'll be mutiny if you try to stop them."

The pilot was not saved, but his machine guns and ammunition belts were. Kane, however, had no opportunity to use these spoils; the following day, a Jap fighter soared high over the dummy camp, and dropped a parachute. A message was tied to it. It was addressed to General Kane, and it read, "*Dear General, and Other Officers of American and Filipino Army: As you know, General Sharp obeyed order of superior General Wainwright and surrender, to submit to Japanese Army. You must be short of rations. Bivouac in jungle is bad for health. All of other American and Filipino except you think better to surrender than to hide.*

"*Do you think it possible to resist longer while waiting for help that does not come? Do you know General MacArthur deserted you? If you and your men surrender, all can see their families when the time comes. Therefore come out with staff under flag of truce to make terms of surrender.*

"*But, if not, we must fight and destroy. Now you have the duty to decide the fate of all your men.*"

It was signed, "*Higashi, Colonel.*"

Kane read the message to the council. Then he said, "Rumors have made me a general. I'll play it that way. Ximenes, are you game to gamble, all or nothing? You have what's left of a uniform, and I have an old one of Datu Ryan's."

"*Seguramente,*" the lieutenant answered. "Why not?"

And then, as an afterthought, he asked what the point of the deception would be. Kane explained the strategy. Then he and Ximenes put on the uniforms which they had worn at their several stops en route from Mindanao, to show the natives of isolated islands that not all of the army had surrendered. Now this morale building equipment was to serve an unexpected purpose.

Kane wore the *chino* khaki which Datu Ryan had given him, though he retained only one star; the wild Irishman's burlesque rank would be laying it on too heavily to be convincing. Winslow accompanied them.

Hajji Maulana took command when Kane left camp with his flag of truce.

They had scarcely reached the cultivated valley floor when a Jap outpost challenged them. That ended the suspense; Kane had half expected to be shot down the moment he hove into view. But apparently the enemy really desired the surrender of the nuisance battalion, and realized that violence would hardly encourage the "troops" to lay down arms.

A thin faced lieutenant, the outpost commander, sat in the doorway of his tent. He glanced at the badly tarnished gilt hat cord and at the stars that Kane wore. He said, "The commanding officer will receive your surrender. Meanwhile, you are under close guard and any attempt to escape will be fired upon."

"I am sure your men are good marksmen, lieutenant. And we have no wish to escape."

CHAPTER VII

A FOOL FOR A FIGHT

A GUARD truck took the prisoners into the town of Panay. There a bullet headed colonel, the Higashi who had signed the invitation to surrender, questioned the two officers. Winslow was at once sent to the sugar refinery, and without doubt, he also would be questioned as a check on Kane's statements and on Ximenes'.

Kane hoped that the chemist would not slip up and vary from the "facts" upon which the three had agreed.

Kane said, "Colonel Higashi, while we are practically without ammunition for our issue weapons, we have a large quantity of captured ammunition, and I compliment you on your excellent service rifle. We have found it very satisfactory."

"Thank you," the colonel answered; his round face puckered in a rather grim smile. "And how are your rations?"

"They can be stretched by raiding. Our main need is for shelter and quinine and treatment for our wounded. We do not feel that we can serve any useful

purpose by further resistance. In fact, our presence has, I understand, inspired the civilian population to outrages which subject them to reprisals. It is largely on their account that we wish to make terms."

"Very considerate, General Kane. We have shot six *presidentes* thus far, eleven *alcaldes,* and three school teachers. Your presence has had a bad effect. Therefore your men must surrender for the good of their fellow citizens. Now, can you prove your identity?"

"I have destroyed my papers."

"Your command is without doubt the survivors of various units. Please name them."

Kane shook his head. "That would be information of value to the enemy, sir. I cannot make a statement."

"It cannot hurt your army for me to know what regiments have disintegrated," Colonel Higashi persisted. "And you can get better terms for your men if you are co-operative."

"My men do not want good terms at such cost, Colonel Higashi. You are a soldier. You know that if terms are not honorable and in accordance with the laws of war, they will decide to fight to a finish."

The colonel nodded. "What do you suggest?"

"Adequate quarters, good hospitalization for those who require it, a standard ration, and a chance to communicate with relatives."

"You speak as if *I* am surrendering," Higashi observed.

Kane chuckled. "Colonel, these disorders do not do credit to your occupation force. If they continue, you will lose face. If you seize all the cane knives, bolos, and the like, the civilian population cannot commit outrages, but neither can they produce sugar. And I have not yet ordered my men to surrender."

"We can bomb them, we can take your camp by assault."

"Of course you can. But in proportion to our numbers, it will not be less costly than Bataan. Japanese arms did not get much glory there, Colonel."

Higashi cursed, leaped to his feet, and then sat down. You forget yourself, sir!"

"Pardon me, but you forgot yourself. Let me repeat—I have not yet ordered my men to surrender. Unless you offer me assurances, and show me the quarters where you propose to keep them, I will not order them to lay down their arms. They are now in charge of an officer who can and will harrass you as long as he has a squad left."

In the end, Colonel Higashi took Kane to see the stockade where the prisoners would build bamboo shelters. The location, well out of town, was not bad; the drainage was adequate, though the water supply was questionable.

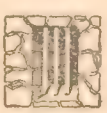
The final demand got a flat refusal: Higashi said, "Impossible to quarter officers with men. Not suitable. Also, too much danger of attempted escape."

Kane shrugged. "Very well, Colonel. Put me where you please. Now, if you furnish me an escort, I shall march my command in, without arms."

"Impossible. Send written order."

Kane had expected this, but he protested bitterly, "I came under a flag of truce. I am entitled to go back to my command."

Higashi was practical and pointed: "You may change your mind. But with you a prisoner, your command is more inclined to surrender."



KANE ended in a cell of the Panay jail. On protesting, he learned that the *juzgado* contained no criminals; its entire population were hostages taken to prevent further civilian outrages. As a concession to his rank, he got a cell to himself.

Later, Ximenes joined him. The lieutenant planted himself on the iron bunk and said, "There was at least as much questioning as I expected. I wonder what Winslow gets?"

Kane grimaced wryly. "I wonder what we'll get when Hajji refuses to surrender!"

Kane had signed the order, addressing it to Captain Datu Hajji Maulana, Philippine Army. The next move was up to the old school teacher, and to the black Bishop.

While Kane and Ximenes sat in the *juzgado,* waiting for Hajji Maulana's reply to the order for surrender, the

Japs marched on hostage after hostage. Every *barrio* for miles around contributed a representative whose life guaranteed the good conduct of his kinsmen. Kane had no chance to talk to them, but he could hear them in adjacent cells. They were fatalistic, stolid, except for a few who prayed for the cessation of "outrages."

One said, "It is those accursed soldiers setting the example! The laws of war protect them, they can ambush the enemy and then surrender, but with a civilian it is otherwise. Now some *tao* picks up a cane knife and what does he do, he settles one man, and then one of us is backed up to a stone wall."

Half a dozen hostages shouted him down. "The laws of war do not protect a soldier against bullets, they do not furnish him with food. We at least are buried like Christians."

"But you don't understand! If I'm to be shot because someone wrecks a truck, I have not even had the satisfaction of having collected in advance from the enemy."

"All the more fools," a realist contributed, "for not doing a bit of bushwhacking when we had the chance."

"If the soldiers surrender, it will go worse with us. When they're locked up, they can't be accused of raiding! They ought to fight on, *chinga'o*, what is a soldier for?"

Kane said to Ximenes, "We are wrong to surrender, we are wrong to continue. Whatever we do is bad for these poor devils. To hell with wearing stars, even temporary ones!"

When the guards hustled Kane and Ximenes into Colonel Higashi's presence, it was easy to guess that Hajji Maulana had lived up to the letter of his orders. For a moment Kane felt that, laws of war or not, he and Ximenes would face a firing squad.

"Your men say," the colonel began, "that since you are a prisoner, they will not obey you."

Kane had often been closer than this to death, in the months since the Jap landing at Davao, yet never the kind which he now felt in the room; the deliberate ritual of reprisal. Hajji Maulana's answer must have been a written outrage to have aroused this cold fury. He shrugged, and tried to say, easily, "That is not my fault, colonel. He is doubtless right, too. Being imprisoned is much the same as being under arrest. And an officer who is under arrest cannot exercise command. You can of course release me. Or—" he now caught the light touch—"you might try going out into the hills and getting them yourself, though they'll not respect you much more than they do me."

"Write another order! Tell them that you'll be shot if they do not surrender at once."

The colonel was not playing. To mention the laws of war would have been the height of whimsy. Yet Kane began to feel that he would survive for a while. "I'll very gladly write the order, but I would be surprised if they obeyed. They are not interested enough in saving their own lives to bother with saving mine. Send for reinforcements and go out and get them. Do with me what you please; I no longer exercise command."

The colonel gestured. The guards marched the prisoners back.

Once more in the cell, Ximenes whispered, "Do you think he's irritated enough to make a slip in judgment?"

"If he isn't, my temporary stars are going to be damn temporary!" Kane answered. "Wonder how Winslow's doing?"

Winslow's return had been mainly to convince the Japs, by direct statement and by implication, that life in the hills was quite unbearable. Though, finally, Winslow could be of great help if things worked out.

As a matter of saving face, the Japs had now to go out and get the soldiers who refused to surrender. Hajji Maulana's defiance made it mandatory to wipe out or capture them to the last man. And the entire build-up tended to prove that there was a considerable party of desperate fellows in the jungle. So the Japs went in force.

THAT night, four men and a noncom came tramping down the corridor. They halted in front of Kane's cell. A rifle butt jarred the bars. A key clashed. A

hinge made a muted creak. Not a word was spoken as the armed party filed into the cell.

But the civilian hostages had awakened. *"Zus-mario-sep!"* they muttered, and crossed themselves. "So they shoot the general and the lieutenant. No priest, nothing."

Another said, "They are brave men. Let us pray for them."

There were vague sounds in the gloom; men stirring, others, just aroused, beginning to question. These swallowed their queries when they heard the murmur of prayers; they added their own voices.

Two men, hands bound behind them, stalked into the corridor. The noncom's lantern, swinging, cast wavering and long shadows on the wall.

The noncom blew out the lantern, and set it on the desk in the office. At the entrance, he handed the keys to a sentry who paced his beat. "Santiago," he said, "don't let them out for a while. And don't walk this post too long. Get out when the locomotive whistles three times."

Kane asked, "How did you do it with so little noise?"

The only answer was a grin. These hill Moros could not have explained, had there been time, just how they *krissed* and stripped the sentries without a scuffle or outcry. This was an art they had known for so many centuries that they moved by instinct, even though the men of their generation had not practiced the art.

Once well away from the jail, Kane said, "I hate to leave those hostages bottled up, till we connect. Something may slip."

Ximenes answered, "There may be a Jap lover among them."

"O.K." But Kane did not like it.

They moved by a route picked out by spies; down the dark alleys of Panay, and thence toward the tracks which ran from the hinterland into Capiz on the coast.

The little locomotive was waiting. She had steam up. Rifle-armed Moros were on guard. Two, dripping with sweat, stuffed more wood into the firebox. Kane glanced at the gauges. "It is damn lucky we got here when we did," he said to Ximenes. "Something's wrong with the pop valve."

"It's wired down," Ximenes said, a moment later. "This sabotage becomes popular today, *verdad?*"

The riflemen wedged themselves into the tender. Kane took the throttle, coupled up to a flatcar, and headed for the distillery. Whatever alarm might now break out in Panay Town would be too late to save the distillery. The telephone wires had been cut.

As he approached the aluminum painted steel fence which enclosed the central, he blew three piping blasts on the peanut roaster whistle. He was wondering whether it would not be better if the hostages stayed in jail, for thus they would have an alibi. Still, his own escape should shield civilians.

The guards on duty were inside the fence, which made Moro bushwhacking impossible. In the moonlight, Kane saw the soldiers snap their rifles to the ready. He laughed. "Damn if they're not challenging a locomotive!"

He opened the throttle wider. Puffing and wheezing, she picked up speed, and quickly, pushing only a flatcar loaded with rock.

He heard the *smack* and *zing* of slugs glancing off the cab. Then the crash: the gates buckled. Locks and chains snapped. The flatcar swept away the obstacle. And then the men in the tender opened fire. *Kris* men darted from cover.

"Ahhhh . . . buguy!" they howled as they bounded into action.

Behind their steel barrier, and with a blaze of floodlights girdling the enclosure of the central, the Japs could have held the place against Kane's entire force, or against a force twice as large. Yet it was not guarded heavily enough to stand against a hand to hand encounter inside the steel barrier. And Colonel Higashi's main body was in the hills, preparing to blast a battalion of die-hards.

Winslow came running through the uproar and leaped to the cab.

"Hey, keep moving, we're in luck! There's a tank car of alcohol in the yards!"

"Can you work the switches?"

Winslow yelled something. Kane caught a glimpse of another captive engineer; the man had a spanner a yard long, and he was joining the rush of Moros who were closing in on the guards. Ximenes was somewhere in the howling confusion. A lone rifleman remained in the tender, popping away as the locomotive rolled past the unloaders and through the long shed and into the yards.

Winslow leaped to the ground and snatched the switch lever. In another moment, the alcohol car was coupled. The engineer climbed to the dome and opened the valve. As he fumbled for matches, bullets smacked the 8000 gallon cylinder. Flame rose in a blue column. Winslow yelled, "Open the throttle wide and jump!"

Kane was quite near the building which housed the forty-foot rectifying column. He pulled the throttle and jumped, landing in a heap. "Run, damn it! Run!" Winslow shouted, and wheeled to give him a hand.

Kane limped along. Pools of bluish flame flowed along the tracks. The punctured tank, now boiling over, was a blazing missile.

THE crash was followed by a rumbling blast. Explosive vapors from the rectifying column had let go. The derailed car and locomotive were now the center of a fire which reached high above the column.

"How about the electrical stuff, the steam engines?"

Winslow grinned. "Simple, but I don't think you need bother."

The firing had ceased. Then Kane heard the pounding and the screaming and the whine. "Generators going wild?"

"Governors put out of order."

"Then it's time to scatter. Oh, hell, I forgot, where do they keep the rum? I came to get a case of it!"

He outraced the blazing alcohol which was spreading towards the warehouse. Ximenes rounded up the guerillas. Flying metal crashed and pounded against girders; fragments screamed as though a shell had burst. The intense blue-white of the flood lights winked out. The big generator had speeded itself to pieces, and the steam engine would follow any moment.

Retreat was easy. By the time that the now skimpy garrison of Panay had reached the blazing central, Kane and his handful were scattering into the darkness of the broad valley. Crossing the paved highway, which before long would be heavily patrolled by armored cars and reconnaissance vehicles, presented no immediate problem. There was nothing to do but get to the *garay* and make sail, hauling for the labyrinth of small islands of the Visayas, and then to remain under cover until the air patrols realized that they were wasting fuel and time.

That was the plan. But up in the hills, something had slipped. Instead of creeping out, leaving Colonel Higashi's troops to surprise the abandoned hills, Hajji and the Bishop were fighting it out; they would not be at the rendezvous.

Kane saw the muzzle flame of light artillery. Star shells made blue-white blots against the sky. Mortar shells, exploding in the jungle, flared like summer lightning. There were answering flashes from the ridge, and the serpentine of bamboo rockets charged with homemade powder. Kane groaned. "My God! That Moro fool is fighting instead of running!"

CHAPTER VIII

SUICIDE STAND

XIMENES, when he ceased cursing, said to Kane, "You cross the highway, give me two or three men, and I'll recall Hajji. You can get away in a *banca* if necessary. Someone has to report back to tell Datu Ryan and the Mindanao men that the mission was accomplished."

The lieutenant of course was right, but Kane shook his head. "The Mindanao men wouldn't give me much of a hand if I returned practically alone. See here, Ximenes, you go back and report, and I'll recall Hajji."

Ximenes frowned. "I cannot obey that order."

"If you were back in the army, and your captain gave you an order to carry

out, you wouldn't refuse, would you?"

"No. Because trained soldiers would not misunderstand. This is different. If you can't go back alone, I cannot go back alone."

So they all changed their course to bear toward the ridge which Hajji was defending with much valor and little sense. The band of crackpots had to be withdrawn before dawn. Higashi must by now know that only a handful held the ridge, and not a desperate battalion. You could, with tricks of musketry, fool a truckload of soldiers, but you could not long fool a Japanese officer.

"Those—God-blasted—fighting-fool—Moros—" Kane panted. "Need—a nursemaid—tackling the best part of a regiment—"

Seventy men simply could not make an impression, regardless of bushwhacking attacks; seventy men could not hold for long, no matter how cleverly disposed and no matter how much ammunition they had; seventy men, nearly half of them armed only with *krisses* and *kampilanes,* would be phenomenally lucky if they got out alive, after having waited so long.

And there was no sign of retreat, nor any cessation of the Japanese pounding with machine gun, with tommy gun, with mortar, and with a couple of light field pieces. Once the sun rose, the short route to the east coast would be hosed by low flying planes. Retreat to the *garay* was now impossible, as Kane saw it, for the Japs would maintain contact, whether the guerillas moved west or moved north.

By some miracle, Hajji had not yet run out of ammunition. That made no sense. As Kane came nearer to the hills, and the right flank of the Japs, he smelled the sulphurous fumes of homemade powder; he could distinguish the bellowing cough of *lantakas.* He cursed the cannoneer clique which must have tempted Hajji to disobey orders.

They ran afoul of Jap flanking parties. The chatter of machine guns and the whipping of slugs through the jungle made the saving of Hajji's madmen temporarily unimportant; they worked their way through the beaten zone without any serious casualties, and without returning the enemy fire. The machine guns ceased, as though their crews had decided that they'd opened up on a false alarm.

For a while, as Kane labored up the slope, sweat-drenched and ready to drop from his unrestrained haste, he lost all view of the skirmish, for he had only the sounds to guide him. Finally he said to Ximenes, "Either I'm punch drunk, or Hajji has a lot more than seventy men and he's got more cartridges than I ever dreamed of. It simply don't make sense!"

The wind shifted and now came from landward instead of from the sea. The night was wearing on. But there might still be a withdrawal, a scattering to the fishing villages on the west coast, and escape in *bancas;* as long as Kane showed himself on the firing line, so that all could see him, the few who finally returned to Mindanao would bear witness that he had not abandoned them. Since it was important for an American to lead the guerillas, it was just as important to prove that such a leader would not run out on them when the going became tough.

They were near the line now, though they did not know how near until rifle fire laced the gloom. The sound of Moro voices made Ximenes yell, "Hold it! Friends!"

But Kane's hat had been riddled before he identified himself and passed the outposts.

THE word of his arrival went ahead of him. Hajji came to meet him. "If you can withdraw," Kane said, "get busy. Damn it, didn't you see the central was afire—didn't you know that we could get to the *garay* long before the Japs could get out of here to cut us off?"

"But the chance seemed too good," Hajji countered. "And the cannoneers, they wanted to try the *lantakas.* But if you say, let us leave."

Just like that: it is up to you to figure a way to get us out of this mess. That's your job—you wear stars, even if they are just temporary stars borrowed from a crackpot sunshiner.

"We can't go north to the *garay.*

They'll skirt the foot of the range and cut us off when we reach the flats, and if they didn't, we'd still have no chance to embark." Kane was too weary to waste any more breath blaming Hajji, so he went on, "Send a few men over the hill to the coast . . . give them time to find *bancas* . . . we'll hold as long as we can, and then pull out. The trail is narrow and we can give the Skibbies hell with a rear guard action. Do you understand?"

"By Allah, that is good!"

"Then pass the word along. Where the devil did you get all the ammunition?"

Hajji ignored the question.

Kane had no chance to repeat it. He heard the Bishop's prodigious laughter burst out. For a moment it drowned the crackle and whack of musketry. Then came a familiar voice: "Good orders, Kane. You're right, there's not a Chinaman's chance of getting to the *garay* you spotted to the north. But don't blame Hajji for holding the Japs here, when the distillery blaze should have pulled them back while your demolition gang was heading for the *garay*."

"Ryan! What the hell—how'd you get here?"

"Tell you later."

"How come you can walk, with that bum leg?"

"Tell you later."

Kane fumbled with his stars. "Take 'em, I'm through, you're here and so it's your show."

"Keep 'em until later. Come on, I'll show you something." He caught Kane's elbow. "Don't get griped, I didn't come here to spoil your show. That distillery blaze is your job, and it was grand. Getting this crowd home, that's just routine for the . . . uh . . . royal navy. So my being here isn't dumping on you at all."

"So you put Hajji up to this cockeyed job?"

"Sure. Shut up a minute, I am showing you something. I have lots of *garays* waiting on the west coast because I brought the whole outfit over. We fell into a Jap munitions dump, and man, man!"

Bullets whacked overhead as Kane went downgrade toward the lines. Mortar shells grumbled and whining fragments spun through the branches. Datu Ryan, standing in darkness so dense that the gleam of his four stars was scarcely perceptible, slapped a hand on Kane's shoulder and said, "Any minute now. Land breeze is getting fresher . . ."

Kane watched. And then, far below, he saw ragged yellow flames. They cropped up and simultaneously along an enormous arc, and in a few moments, they joined. The thin line became broad. Sparks rose high, and rained down, setting fresh fires. Hot gusts began to reach into the jungle. There was a sullen roar as the wind whipped the fires on and on, racing toward the foot of the slope.

"That cogon grass, and some of the cane fields," Ryan said, "were pretty dry —no rain for a couple days, the men told me. The Skibbies can get out if they move fast. Or they can run like hell upgrade to beat the fire and meet us. How you like?"

Kane liked it. Men silhouetted by a curtain of flame would be like ducks in a shooting gallery. Men racing up that heart breaking slope would be too winded to match the waiting line of riflemen and *kris*-men. They'd be burned out, shaky, unable to make good use of gun or bayonet. And instead of being favored by odds of more than ten to one, it was now no better than three to one.

"And the odds will be about level, when the survivors reach us," Kane said.

It worked out as Ryan had anticipated when, early that evening, he had sent men to loop behind the Jap line and wait for the wind to shift. The retreat, unharassed, was in the direction Kane had proposed. The Bishop, once more riding Daniel-Come-to-Judgment, sang *Ole Man River* as he went down the rocky trail.

Porters carried Winslow, who had been winged; the other employees liberated by the raid on the central moved under their own power.

Well before dawn, three tightly packed *garays* swooped out to sea, while cannoneers lashed *lantakas* into place.

Finally, Kane had his chance to corner Datu Ryan on the after deck of the racing pirate ship. "You've still not told me—"

"BEEN busy as hell. Well, I heard how you made a detour to raid the Jap camp at Dalipuga. You won, but it was a bad boner. Always stick to your mission. Then we heard how you dynamited a transport, which only by the grace of God didn't manage to gun you out of the water. That tangle was what you got for your Dalipuga detour. And then I got worried. I figured you'd—"

"Muff the distillery job?"

"Mmm . . . no. I figured you might be rounded up by a destroyer before you ever got to Capiz. The Japs lost lots of face by your damn fool detours. So when I found some *garays* that old Datu Mahmud had been keeping for years—"

Kane chuckled. "You mean that old —— still hoped to be a pirate again?"

"Right. So we'd made a good raid, and we had the *garays*, and we sailed for Nava, which was my idea of the best landing. It wasn't till we got into the Mt. Totocan range that we found out that your base was off Kalibo. Man, man, in spite of your cockeyed detours, you came across. By the way, what's your definition of a general?"

Kane grimaced. "A general is a tackling dummy, he carries all the grief, every boner he pulls kills his men instead of killing him, and he gets hump shouldered from the weight of stars."

"That's only half of it," Ryan added. "A general is a fellow who can make last minute changes in his plans and make them work out. And for all your cockeyed crazy detours, that's what you did."

"Thanks." This was on the dry and grim side. "Now, your leg? That's the fastest recovery I ever heard of."

Datu Ryan grinned. "Had to fake it. There was a scratch, but I built it up. I had to have a second in command. Suppose I really had been knocked off? So I dumped the temporary stars on you to see if you had what it took. And to give you the art of leadership in three simple lessons. Another reason I trailed after you was because I felt guilty, in a way, pouring it on you so heavily."

Kane pondered. He tried to swallow his resentment, but he could not. He said, "Take off some of your stars, till we're both wearing the same number."

Ryan's face twisted in an odd smile as he pruned his shoulder constellations. But when the job was done, he did not put up his hands. Kane tightened, poised himself, telegraphed the punch he was about to uncork. "Put 'em up, Datu! I'm not kicking about my own risks, I am kicking about having had the lives of seventy-odd men dumped into my hands. Coming out of it was luck, not sense—"

He choked. His eyes blurred. "Put 'em up, you ——!"

Ryan shook his head. "Sock me. You're entitled to it, fella. No defense. But look here. If a man who won't fight in the ranks is a slacker, *what's a fellow who won't exercise command, when it is his time and turn?*"

Kane lowered his fists. He had nothing to say. He would have turned, but Ryan asked, "So you're not socking me. Anything else you've got for me?"

Then Kane remembered. "Let's get it out of my pack. Couldn't carry a case, but I did get a bottle of Panay rum before the warehouse went up."

FEATHERS for the OSPREY'S NEST

BY WILLIAM MARSHALL RUSH

ILLUSTRATED BY LYNN BOGUE HUNT

Baldhead saw Pandion winging homeward with a carp and dived like a streak of black lightning.

THE ospreys came in April, after snow was gone from the rolling foothills and long, sloping mountain ridges. The first day there were ten of them in the canyon and they put on a glorious exhibition of aerial gymnastics. They dived, banked, flew in spirals, climbed straight into the blue, stalled, went into dazzling pursuit and power dives. For hour after hour the great birds maneuvered tirelessly, showing incredible skill and swiftness on their cambered six-foot wingspread.

As they banked and wheeled in the sun their silvery white underparts and black upper parts flashed a dot and dash

heliograph to the countryside below. "The ospreys have come back!" And all the time they screamed their love notes, "*Cree-cree-cree!*" Joyful at another mating season, at being home from the far south, they reveled in this day of courtship. They mated for life, but each springtime they renewed their pledges of love and fidelity.

The second day there was only one pair in the canyon. The rest had gone to nesting places of their own. Pandion and his mate took the old nest on top of a rock pinnacle, the aerie that had been used by their kind for centuries. Winter snow and wind had dealt hardly with the huge pile of sticks on the rock and it had to be made fit for nesting and rearing their young. Pandion's mate stayed in the aerie and arranged with critical care the material that he made hundreds of trips to fetch.

He carried large sticks, some as thick as broom handles, then smaller ones, until he was bringing mere twigs. He found an old gunnysack lying beside the creek, pulled it free of entangling grass and weeds and flew it to the aerie. A piece of rope hanging on a wire fence was a prize his mate greeted with delight. Dead weed stems, dried grass, paper-like leaves of mountain ash and maple, black moss from the evergreen trees. Last of all he carried what feathers he could find, from where a weasel had killed a grouse, a hawk had dropped a duck, and best of all, feathers from a gray goose that had died of a gunshot wound. They made a warm, soft lining for the aerie.

PANDION'S mate laid three eggs, about the size that a large hen might lay. They were beautifully colored with purple, orange and red on a white ground, and more delicate shades—lilac, buff and peach, deepening into full violet, red and even black.

Pandion was a good provider. He fished every day, most of the time in the shallow waters of Mystic Lake, two miles from the aerie, where whitefish and carp were plentiful, or in the tiny stream that threaded the canyon floor, alive with spotted trout. He never tried the river. Its waters were too turbulent for dive fishing.

Baldhead, the enormous eagle, whose wingspread was all of seven feet, moved into the canyon after the ospreys were settled. His snowy crest flashed from the azure sky where he soared a mile above the earth, searching with telescopic eye for easy provender. Baldhead's heart was as black as his head was white, where ospreys and all lesser creatures were concerned.

Life could have been idyllic in this picturesque land of mountains, lakes and trees, but Baldhead's predatory nature chafed at peace and quiet. He wanted to rob, kill, destroy. Largest and strongest of all the birds, he preyed upon weaker species. There was plenty for all but he preferred what someone else had.

HE was bitterly jealous of the ease with which Pandion fished. It was a pretty exhibition of timing, speed and skill. The osprey came in over Mystic Lake, rode the air currents and watched until he located a school of whitefish. He floated easily, gently, like a fluff of cottonwood down, lower and lower, until he was only sixty feet above the water. Then, unleashing his superb strength in a burst of speed, he twisted down in a long spiral to hit the water with a tremendous splash, feet first, long, slim, silver-lined wings folded together over his back. In a second he emerged with a two-pound whitefish firmly grasped in his pale blue talons. It weighed half as much as Pandion himself and he needed all the energy in his lean, powerful muscles to rise from the water with it. He held the fish on an even keel, lengthwise with his line of flight, so that it looked like a part of him, like a pontoon on a flying boat.

Baldhead had watched greedily from a tall treetop in the cliffs a thousand feet above. Now he moved swiftly to the attack. He soared to a position four hundred feet above the osprey, gauged its speed and dived. Pandion saw him coming and tried to hurry ahead to the aerie where he could drop the fish and defend himself, but it was too heavy to permit fast flying.

Pandion banked and spun to one side. The eagle missed, circled and climbed again. Now he knew just how big the fish was and how greatly it handicapped Pandion. He dived with truer aim. Pandion banked again, the eagle snatched the fish in his own talons, there was a brief struggle and Baldhead, twice as heavy and powerful as the osprey, flew away with the prize. Pandion alighted in a tree to rest, then went back to the lake to fish again. His mate must eat.

IT was the first of a series of piratical attacks. Baldhead hid in a different place each day, sometimes in a tall tree, sometimes in rough cliffs that bordered the river. Often he circled out of the upper reaches of the canyon just at the right time to intercept and rob Pandion. He never tackled the osprey unless Pandion was carrying a load of fish and thus at a disadvantage. Without a handicap, in a free-for-all fight, the osprey could best old Baldhead and the eagle knew it.

Baldhead's unfailing success made him power mad. He grew over-bold and one day pursued Pandion too close to the aerie. This time the osprey did not soar high with his catch, but flew low along the canyon floor. Baldhead came in behind him. Pandion put every ounce of strength he had into a final effort. The rock pinnacle loomed ahead.

"*Chee-ee-eep! Chee-ee-eep! Chee-ee-eep!*" shrilled his osprey scream.

His mate came over the edge of the nest, screaming back in a frenzy of excitement, "*Chi-i-i-ick! Chi-i-i-ick! Chi-i-i-ick!*" almost as loudly as her mate as she swooped to the rescue.

Baldhead turned in ignominious flight with Pandion's mate close upon him. The lesson did not deter the eagle in his banditry, but it made him more cautious. Next day he was back in the canyon, perched in a tall pine tree, waiting for Pandion as before, but he was careful to stay at a respectful distance from the nesting osprey.

Three young hatched in the osprey nest; downy, naked, silent, awkward, ugly little things whose wide, gaping mouths spurred Pandion to redouble his fishing efforts. In a week or so they found their voices, noisy baby imitations of their parents', "*Whew-whew-whew, tseep-tseep, whick-ick-ick, ku-ku-ku.*"

Pandion caught and carried fish for them day after day, perching at guard on the rim of the nest while he tore his catch apart with beak and talons. The mother osprey chewed the bits of carp and whitefish and placed them in the young ones' mouths. They feathered out and grew in size and strength. Soon would come the momentous day when they would leave the nest on their first flight. As the days grew shorter the ospreys would make longer and longer flights until they were full grown, ready to go out and catch their own fish and fight their own battles.

(Continued on page 161)

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DYE

Randy saw the small dark hole appear in Cristo's forehead, and then another shot crashed, and he jerked around in time to see Hermanny fold on his face.

SIX WEEKS SOUTH OF TEXAS

By LESLIE T. WHITE

THE STORY THUS FAR:

After six weeks of hard travel, Texan RANDY DENT arrives at Boa Vista, Brazil, with a herd of seven prize Hereford bulls. He is to deliver them there to PEDRO BARBOSA, ranchowner, and receive $25,000 in gold—twenty for JIM HANLEY, his Texas boss; five for himself. But when he inquires for Barbosa at a saloon, a huge, one-eyed man introduces himself as MANOEL SILVA and leads Randy to a back room where Barbosa lies, shot dead. Manoel, however, denies any knowledge of the murder.

Determined to get the bulls to Barbosa's great *fazenda* in Paradise Valley, Randy hires Manoel as his guide for fifty dollars. Next day Manoel turns up with two trucks and native helpers and the 150-mile journey begins.

En route they hear tales of a bandit, "The Beast of the Seven Heads," who is terrorizing the south Mato Grasso—and the natives desert the party, after disabling the trucks. Manoel acquires two horses and they press on, the fat man suggesting a short cut across the ranch

of NESTOR FIGUERIDO, adjoining Barbosa's. On the way, a herd of wild cattle breaks across their trail, stampeding Randy's bulls—and a moment later three riders come into view.

To Randy's surprise, Manoel shouts a warning, wheels his horse and flees. But the Texan, sure the stampede was deliberate, gallops at the riders and bowls over their leader. In the ensuing fight, Randy trounces the man—and turns to find a pretty girl glaring at him. He learns his antagonist is Nestor Figueirido; the girl, his sister MARIANA. At gunpoint Randy forces the men to round up his bulls and drive them to Barbosa's ranch.

There he meets BENTO HERMANNY, Barbosa's arrogant partner, who regrets Barbosa's mysterious death—but gladly accepts the bulls. Then Randy tells of Manoel and his sudden flight, and Hermanny identifies the fat man as "The Beast of the Seven Heads"—and undoubtedly Barbosa's killer. Next day, Hermanny enthuses over Paradise Valley—though maintaining that the small ranchers are through—and offers the

Texan a job. Randy, eager to return home, refuses.

That night, while Hermanny's men are searching for Manoel, the bandit boldly turns up at Randy's quarters, asking for his fifty dollars. Randy pays him and hurries him off.

Next day Randy leaves the *fazenda*, his money-belt bulging with $25,000 in gold and with Foreman EDUARDO VALEZ as his guide. That night, as the two men squat by their campfire, a gunman ambushes them, killing Eduardo and wounding Randy. When the Texan regains consciousness the money-belt is gone!

Badly wounded, Randy manages to mount a horse, but the dark trip is only a blur of pain in his memory. His last recollection is of seeing lights ahead—before he passes out completely.

Next day, Randy finds himself a patient in Hermanny's ranchhouse, cared for by the housekeeper, TERESA. Bitterly reporting the theft and murder, Randy offers to accept the job as Hermanny's *capitaz*—and is accepted. He knows he must regain the lost money—or never return home.

A week later, Hermanny tells Randy he has learned Manoel's whereabouts . . . says it was undoubtedly he who stole the money . . . and asks the Texan to undertake his capture. Randy gladly accepts the commission.

With a group of Hermanny's picked cut-throats—whom he distrusts as much as he does their leader, CRISTINO—Randy sets out. But the elusive Manoel is not at the little settlement when they arrive, and it is then that he learns how utterly ruthless Hermanny's men are. Before he can stop them, they have fired the defenseless peasants' homes and murdered several of their number. Enraged, Randy knows Hermanny was more interested in wiping out the small farming settlement than in capturing Manoel. It is the old Texas range war being repeated in Brazil.

Facing Hermanny, Randy can get no satisfaction. The *fazendeiro* sides with his hired killers; bitter words, threats follow. Randy decides to quit, but before he can take that step, another emergency comes up. That night two of the prize bulls are stolen. So when Teresa says she is sure of Manoel's present hideout, Randy agrees to lead a second party to seize him.

Riding silently in the dark, fever gripping him, Randy is totally unprepared for the ambush they ride into—and Randy, unhorsed in the one-sided fight, is knocked unconscious.

The ten following days are vague and fever-filled—but when the Texan's senses return he finds Mariana standing by his bed! She has been nursing him in the bandit's camp! Manoel and his sister, Teresa, are also present, of course.

Earning Mariana's friendship, Randy now begins to learn the truth. Though Manoel has been stealing Hermanny's prize bulls, it is the ruthless rancher who is responsible for the past crimes: the death of Barbosa; the ambushing of Randy and Eduardo; Eduardo's murder; the theft of the $25,000. And when one last crime is committed—when Hermanny kills Mariana's brother—Randy makes his big decision. He will change allegiance from Hermanny to Mariana, become her foreman and defeat Hermanny's scheme to force her to sell out to him.

During the days that follow, living on Mariana's ranch, Randy realizes he has fallen in love with the girl—and she seems to reciprocate. But he can't think of such things now. A range-war rages between Hermanny and Mariana—with the criminal rancher's hatred directed at the interfering Texan. So in due time Hermanny plays his first trump card.

One morning the ruthless *capitura*—Brazil's bandit-hunting mounted police—arrive at the ranch. They want Randy Dent. Hermanny has reported that the Texan has talked to Manoel even after he knew the fat man was an outlaw. Under Brazilian law, such an act is punishable by imprisonment. To prevent Randy's immediate arrest, Mariana pledges her *fazenda* as security that he will appear for trial—and Randy knows Hermanny will do everything in his power to see that he does *not* appear, thus costing the girl her ranch. Yet if he *does* appear, he will surely receive a cruelly severe sentence.

Feeling that they are trapped—that

even Mariana's own ranchhands resent him—Randy rides the range one morning, then keeps a pre-arranged rendezvous with Mariana. When she doesn't show up, he is uneasy. Then he sees smoke—from the direction of the ranch! Racing back, he finds the place in flames . . . old Tuba, a faithful follower, dead on the floor of the struggle-wrecked room . . . and the girl is missing!

PART III

HE rode hard, sensing the full import of this crowning irony. In his effort to help Mariana, he had cost her not only her *fazenda,* but perhaps her life as well. Well, he knew where he was going, and what he would do when he got there, even though no actual thought of it crossed his mind. The decision was instinctive.

As he galloped westward to the line fence, he recognized the exact spot where he had ridden with Mariana that day, which now seemed so very long ago, when he had brought the bulls down. He had kissed her lips that afternoon. The recollection gave him a wrench, like a knife thrust. He pulled up short and dismounted. As he started to take down the fence, he glimpsed a horse and rider standing in the shadow of the trees. He whipped out his revolver when a voice called:

"*Para la!* Stop there! It is only me!"

Randy paused with his thumb on the hammer as the beefy rider urged the horse out into the wind.

"*Teresa!* What in hell are *you* doing here?"

She loomed larger than the small horse she was riding, and with the wind lashing her long black hair around her moon face, she looked like a fantastic gargoyle. She started silently at him with large questing eyes until he shouted at her again:

"What in hell are you doing here?"

"I ride to *Bom Fim,*" she grunted, and Randy knew she was lying. She had been waiting for someone.

"How long have you been standing here?" he demanded.

She heaved her shapeless body in a shrug. It was useless to question her.

"Where you go now?" she countered.

He said: "Hermanny's," and saw that he had not surprised her. "Look," he pleaded. "Where is Manoel?"

She sniffled loudly. "Who can say, *senhor?*"

A sudden flash of common sense warned him that she had waited there for him, that she had something to say, so he held his peace and waited. Teresa stared off toward the smoke. The wind had veered a little and was sweeping it away from the houses. Randy felt the tension building up inside him until he wanted to strike her, but he restrained himself.

"Do not go that way," Teresa said finally, nodding towards the *carreta* trail that led to the Hermanny house. "Many men wait there. Instead, take the path along the creek which winds between the hills. That way is the safe way. Walk, and before the sun sleeps, you will find yourself behind the big house. After that . . . " She shrugged again.

"How do you know this?" Randy asked her.

She met his eyes. "Because that way I stole the bulls!" She slapped her beefy legs against the little horses' ribs and rode away.

Over his shoulder, Randy watched her pass out of sight. For an instant he had a flash of suspicion that it might be a trap. Well, hell, he had to trust someone. He turned his mount toward the creek.

CHAPTER XI

A TICKET HOME

THERE was still some daylight left when Randy Dent reined the little roan away from the purple solitude of the creek trail and walked her to the summit of a knoll. From the vantage of a grove of trees, he could see the rectangle of buildings on the opposite hillock. As he watched riders moved up the slope nearly half a mile away and turned into the corrals. The day's work was over, and sunset gilded the windows of the big house. Behind one of those windows

was Bento Hermanny. Randy hunkered down with his back against a tree. His nerves were under control and his hand was steady. He could wait.

In the fleeting twilight, he chose his path. It was definitely a one-way trip, for even if he penetrated Hermanny's cordon of gunmen to get into the house, he'd not get out. But he gave no thought to that; his whole consciousness was concentrated on facing Bento Hermanny. After that, the future, if it existed at all, could take care of itself.

Darkness came swiftly, and yellow patches of light spotted the windows of Hermanny's house. Randy marked the office window in his mind. He smoked another cigarette, then rose slowly. For a moment he debated whether to turn the roan loose to wander home, but decided against it. He made certain she was secure, loosened the gun in its holster, and stepped out of the grove.

The *Pampero* had dulled the heavens, and there was no moon. Randy walked steadily across the swale, pausing beside an occasional bush to orient himself. It was not men he feared, but the mongrel dogs. If they started a clatter, he was through. But the wind was making a whining noise that should cover any slight sound he might make, and he was moving against it so that his scent would not carry. His luck was good—so far!

Within a hundred feet of the white ranch fence, he stopped abruptly beside a clump of brush. He was not alone! He stood stock still, his whole senses aching to pick up the warning his intuition had flashed him. He was afraid the pounding of his heart would betray him. Very slowly he let his right hand slide over the rough butt of his revolver. His index finger slipped over the trigger, and his thumb steadied the hammer.

For an agonizing instant, he could see nothing. Then a tall shadow disassociated itself from the black bulk of the bushes and moved tentatively toward him. Randy sucked in his breath, braced himself, and drew his gun.

"*Hold it!*" he snarled, in Spanish.

As the bulky figure charged him in panic, Randy came within an ace of firing point blank. But he caught himself just in time—as a huge *emu,* the South American ostrich, sailed past him to dash pell-mell across the swale.

He lowered his gun and stared after the terrified bird. His knes felt wobbly and his heart was doing back-flips in his chest. But he could still laugh. He threw a curse in the direction of the *emu,* and turned toward the house. Somehow he felt better.

Through the deep-set window he saw Bento Hermanny sprawled behind his desk with a tall glass in his hand. Gin and *tonica*—a good drink for a fever-ridden climate. Randy smiled mirthlessly and moved toward a side door he had marked in his mind. It was unlocked. He sidled in, soundless as a shadow, and ghosted down the corridor. The office door was ajar. He ratcheted back the hammer, and after a brief glance up and down the hallway, stepped into the room.

"*Don't move!*" he warned Hermanny.

THE *fazendeiro* glanced up, and for a passing instant, his pale eyes brightened. Then the metal screen was drawn over them again, curtaining his thoughts. He set his glass down deliberately and leaned forward on his elbows. With his seamed, yellowish features and mane of hair, he looked like a tough old lion.

There was no sound in the room. The window at Hermanny's back was open, for it was on the lee side of the house. Keeping the man covered, Randy locked the door through which he had entered, then edged around the room and pulled shut the heavy drapes. After that, he faced Hermanny across the desk. Since his first warning, neither had spoken.

Randy pointed his .45 in the *fazendeiro's* face, and pulled the trigger, but holding back the hammer with his thumb. That slight pressure was all that stood between Bento Hermanny and eternity, but if the man was worried, he gave no sign. His eyes seemed to assume an elliptic shape, like a cat's, and just as obscure. Watching him, Randy thought: *Why in hell don't I just kill him and have it over with?*

"Where," Randy demanded slowly, "is Mariana Figuereido?"

Hermanny moved his glass an inch across the desk top. "I knew this would

bring you here on the run," he remarked. "She is safe enough—at the moment."

Randy leaned over the desk and slashed him across the mouth with the back of his left hand. The blow seemed to wipe away the *fazendeiro's* lips, leaving his mouth a flat, fish-like scar.

"*Talk!*"

Hermanny exhaled heavily. "I should have killed you for that," he said, fighting for control. "But this other way is simpler and profits more. If you will glance behind you, *Senhor Norte Americanó,* you will realize your mistake."

"You fool!" snarled Randy. "Do you think I'll fall for your ancient tricks. Answer my. . ."

"*Para la!*" growled a voice, and simultaneously a gun muzzle jabbed the Texan in the spine. "Raise the hands with caution, *senhor!*"

For a long instant, Randy froze immobile. He had but to lift his thumb and Hermanny would join him in death. And yet the thought flashed through his mind that he wasn't quite ready to sell out. It wasn't fear—he was too bitter and angry to know fear—but a consciousness of the utter futility of such a gesture.

"Remember the girl," Hermanny suggested softly.

Very slowly, Randy lifted his arms. He saw the brief glimmer of relief in Hermanny's eyes as the man rose and lifted the gun out of his hand.

"Now, *gringo,*" Hermanny snapped, "you will sit down." A hand jerked Randy back into a chair, and he saw for the first time who it was behind the unseen gun. It was the fat lieutenant of the *capitura,* who had been with Captain Viera at the Figuereido house.

"*Bom dia, senhor,*" smirked the lieutenant.

From another doorway stepped a rider with a shotgun in his hand.

It was so quiet in the room that Randy could hear the soft moan of the wind as it swept across the campo and sucked the curtains toward the open window with a faint rustling of cloth. *Well, I should have killed him,* Randy told himself. *Now I wonder why he does not kill me?* The presence of the fat lieutenant puzzled him further, and once again he was struck with the realization that Benito Hermanny was no common thief. He built his crimes slowly, methodically, leaving no trails and permitting no comebacks. To Randy, whose mind worked along direct lines, the whole thing was utterly confusing and complicated.

Hermanny circled the desk and sat on one hip, staring down at him.

"Dent," said the *fazendeiro* at last, "you are a simple-minded idiot. I want you to listen carefully to what I will say. I do not want to kill you if I can avoid it. Alive, you suit my purpose much better. This is neither squeamishness or affection; I could have had you shot a dozen times. You understand?"

In spite of his rage, the truth of that statement brought a shrug from Randy. It was true, but he could not understand it.

"The girl is in good hands—Cristino's," Hermanny went on, with a dry smile. "But she will come to no harm. That would involve explanation to the tiresome and ardent Captain Viéra. As would your death."

So, thought Randy, Viéra of the *capitura* was an honest man. He glanced sideways at the grinning face of the lieutenant. Obviously, the latter was playing Hermanny's game. The picture began to take shape, and Randy breathed a little easier. Hermanny, he realized, wanted to get the Figuereido property by semi-legal means—if possible. If he, Randy, did not appear at his trial, the bond Mariana posted would be forfeit, but if he were dead, Mariana would not lose her place.

Hermanny guessed his thoughts. "You begin to see," he commented. "That is good. Lieutenant Brito and some of my men will escort you," he smiled a little, "unofficially, of course, to the railroad. They will make sure that you entrain for São Paulo. Thus, running away, you will be outlawed here in the Mato Grosso —and if you return, you will be shot on sight. That is plain, is it not?"

"That's plain enough," growled Randy.

HERMANNY watched him closely. "There is just one other thing," he said. "The bulls. Five of them have been stolen by your friend Manoel. You will

tell me where those bulls are now, and for it I will give you money to return to your Texas."

Randy snorted. "I don't know anything about your damn bulls!"

Brito swung his heavy revolver and struck Randy on the side of the head. The blow knocked him clear of the chair, and he caught himself against the desk. He tried to spring to his feet, but Brito hit him on the forehead and left him dazed.

"Where has Manoel hidden my bulls?" repeated Hermanny.

"I told you—I don't know!" Randy yelled.

Hermanny lifted his eyes to a spot behind Randy's head. A hair rope dropped over the Texan's head and tightened on his throat. He tried to fight, but Brito pistol-whipped him quiet and the rope strangled him. He was starting to slide unconscious when the pressure let up a little.

"The bulls, *senhor*?"

Randy tried to speak, but succeeded only in an unintelligible croak. He wagged his head. Then the beating started. . . .

How long it lasted, Randy didn't know, for he had periods of blankness that were free of pain. But at long last, he heard Hermanny say in Spanish:

"*Para la!* Stop there! The fool does not know! In God's name do not kill him!"

Only partially conscious, Randy was half-dragged, half led out of the house and boosted onto a horse. He realized, vaguely, that it was his little roan. His hands were tied, and his ankles bound to the stirrups. Somebody heaved a pail of cold water into his face. The moon had risen, and looking down from the saddle, Randy saw Hermanny staring up at him.

"*Adios, senhor!*" said the *fazendeiro*. "This is good-bye. You will stay in your own country after this, perhaps. Senhor Brito will buy you a ticket home. Once again I remind you—you will be an outlaw if you return!"

Randy could hardly hear him for the heavy sound of his own breathing.

"I should have killed you!" he managed dully. "It was a mistake."

Hermanny grinned. "You had that chance," he jeered, "but you *Norte Americanos* lack guts. Your quixotic Yankee chivalry would not let you act like a man. Go back to your own country where the hand of a female rules your head. This is no place for you. Good-bye."

Someone struck the little mare and she plunged ahead. A dim, half-seen rider took the lead. Brito ranged on one side of Randy; a cowhand on the other. In this wise they wound down from the house on the hill.

CHAPTER XII

THE TIGER AND THE FOX

NOW they were across the property line and jogging along the rough *carreta* trail. The lead rider had fallen back so that they formed a small triangle with the Texan trapped in between. The *Pampero* had blown itself out, leaving a new freshness to the air.

But Randy Dent was not thinking of those things. Even his bitterness had melted into resignation. For the first time in his young life, the full understanding of what a woman could mean was made clear. His mind refused to accept the fact that he would never see her again, and yet Randy knew it would have to be so. He could never return here to the Mato Grosso. He wondered if he could send for her. But to what? Slim Jim Hanley would perhaps believe his wild story of his adventures, but who else? By the time he had paid back that money, a lifetime would have passed.

The moon laid a slow track across the heavens. The night grew cold. It had been hours since anyone had spoken, and the jingle of bit-chains had steadied into a musical rhythm. Once they halted, and the lead rider cantered ahead, his carbine flat athwart the saddle. Brito hung a cigarette from his lips, and in the sudden flare of his match, his dark face wore a mask of anxiety. Later, the rider jogged back and shook his head. They rode again in formation.

But a tension was building. It started with the men and through them passed to the horses. The little roan grew nerv-

ous, and when she jerked uneasily, the tight thongs on Randy's ankles hurt. They had reached higher ground, and the mato was thicker here. Occasionally a heavy animal crashed through the undergrowth, and the horses shied suddenly. The riders would curse and paw for their guns, and then take out their fear on their mounts.

Finally Brito ordered the leader to ride on ahead. The man rebelled, and Brito cursed him savagely. After that, they traded places and the fat lieutenant pushed his big bay to the fore.

They rode out of timber into a meadow. The dawn was not far off. and languid ribbons of mist hovered over the grass, giving it a dreamy, unreal quality. Brito stopped and waited for the others to catch up. He kept standing up in his stirrups and searching the close horizon with his eyes. Although they had never exceeded a walk, the horses were lathered with sweat.

Riding out of the mists, they started up a hill. The road wound through a dark corridor of trees that, with the rounded opening visible at the far end, reminded Randy of a tunnel. Brito was having trouble with his bay. The horse danced from one side of the narrow road to the other. Even the weary little roan kept revolving her ears.

In the trees it was very cold. With one accord, the horses increased their gait. Randy kept his eyes on the open sky ahead. It changed from a dark slate to gun-metal gray. And as he watched, a single rider evolved.

Whether the stranger came from the side, or whether the road dipped and he had come straight toward them, Randy could not tell. One minute there was a round clear patch of sky, the next the silhouette of a man and a horse.

Brito cried a warning, and his horse pawed the air. A rifle smashed the silence, and with it the hard *spa-n-n-g* of a bullet. Brito was plucked from his horse, and before he hit the ground two more reports blended into one roar. None of the three men made a sound, save in striking the ground.

"*Amigo!*" called the lone rider. "You are all right—*Gracas a Deus!*"

The little roan plunged in terror, and would have bolted, but abruptly other men crowded in and she was secured. Rough hands swiftly severed Randy's bindings, and he rode up to where Manoel awaited him.

IF things had been unreal before, they were worse now. Randy stared blankly at the bland, comical face of Manoel. It had all happened too swiftly for his mind to catch up.

Manoel seemed to understand, for he gave a deep belly-laugh that shook his horse.

"Ah, *amigo,* you are all time surprise w'en you see Manoel. Did I not say you 'ave not'ing to fear when I, Manoel Jose Antonio Diniz Felippe Carlos Sebastião Francisco Silva, are your ver' good fran'?"

"My God!" gasped Randy. "Who wouldn't be surprised? How in hell do you always show up just at the exact moment . . .?" He shrugged hopelessly.

"*Puxa!* That are the secret, *meu amigo.* If Manoel come only when other people expect heem, then there would soon be no Manoel. Is it not so? I 'ave many ears, *senhor,* and for it I am call *O Bicho das Sete Cabecas*—the Beast of the Seven Heads. Som fon, eh, *amigo?*" He howled with laughter.

Randy didn't laugh. He was staring back where the three bodies lay in the trail.

"Do you know you've just killed a lieutenant of the *capitura?*"

"Bah!" snorted Manoel. "That wan ees no good. I 'ave keel many like heem. But eet is no sport, *senhor,* for w'en I come—poof, that wan die of fear."

"Hmmmnn! I'm afraid you helped the fear just a little," Randy said dryly. "We better bury them."

"*Não, não, amigo!* Would you cheat the leetle *urubus? Puxa,* Manoel never do unkind thing like that."

"Hell, man," protested Randy. "Hermanny and the *capitura* will find those bodies and know that I've got away."

"*Sim!* That is good." Manoel wagged a fat forefinger. "The secret of Manoel is this, *amigo,* and for it I am wan healthy mans: I always think careful, 'W'at is the thing a smart man would

do?' W'en I decide that—*I do not do it.* I do the *other* thing, and for it, people are always surprise!"

Randy sighed, and shook his head. This crazy, one-eyed thief kept one jump ahead of him.

"O. K.," he said wearily. "Let's get the hell out of here. I'm in for it now. And I've got to find Mariana Figuereido. Hermanny had her . . ."

"*Sim, sim!* Manoel know all about that," he grinned.

"You know where she is?"

Manoel spread his hands. "Not yet. But Manoel he do not worry. *Puxa!* One pretty *senhorita* like that, she are always safe."

"She's with Cristino!" the Texan grated impatiently.

"Bah! That wan is a peeg. Someday I cut hees heart out." He changed the subject. "*Senhor,* I weel geeve you a gun."

Randy had forgotten about guns. He shook his head and reached inside his shirt. Tuba's revolver was still there. He shoved it in his empty holster.

Manoel recognized the gun. "That Tuba was an hones' man," he remarked. "But a fool! He say Manoel was a poor thief. Bah! I am wan ver', ver' *smart* thief!" He nodded at his riders, and they quickly swung their mounts and vanished into the mato. In a moment, Randy and Manoel were alone.

"Now," said Manoel, "we go."

BY mid-morning they had reached the Guarani border and crossed the *Rio Apa* into Paraguay. After that, they followed a winding stream for a couple of miles until they came to a horseshoe bend. Manoel told the American to water his horse a moment, then he cantered up the steep bank. In ten minutes he was back. Smilingly, he showed Randy the cave, a stone's throw from the bend.

It was a good camp, and the small rocks laid by the creek's current left no tracks. Riders could pass within twenty feet of the narrow entrance and miss the place. Inside there was room for perhaps four horses and men, but that was all.

Manoel anticipated Randy's unspoken question. "Hermanny and that *capitura* all time theenk Manoel have a big hide-away, with many men. *Puxa!* They are fools! They do not understan' that Manoel's men till the soil and tend the cattle under their ver' noses all day long. Manoel's riders are the poor who are rich in spirit, *senhor.* They are not thieves, but soldiers of liberty."

Randy whistled softly and looked at Manoel with new interest. Manoel was no longer smiling.

"I are afraid you do not understan', *amigo.*"

The Texan nodded his head. "I do now, Manoel, and I salute you."

Manoel's moment of seriousness passed. "*Gracas a Deus!* But we cannot *salud* with a dry mouth. For that, I 'ave wine, *amigo.*"

He dropped a heavy blanket over the cave's entrance and lighted an ancient lantern. Randy dropped onto a rough wooden bench, while Manoel rooted out a bottle of wine and two old pewter cups. As the stimulant warmed his blood, Randy weighed his own predicament.

Manoel's well-meant rescue had made him an outlaw. It was a new experience for Randy Dent, for aside from an occasional argument with the local constable back in his native Texas, he had never been on the wrong side of the law. Now he was marooned in the middle of a strange continent with a price on his head. Hermanny would see to that. Randy snorted. Bento Hermanny would probably be well pleased at the turn of events, for now Randy would be unable to appear on the former charge and the Figuereido property would be forfeit.

Manoel emptied his second cup of wine, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"You will be comfortable here, *amigo.*"

Randy stubbed out his smoke. "Look, Manoel, I've got to find *Senhorita* Figuereido and clear out of this country. *Pronto!* You understand?"

Manoel unsheathed his knife, crossed his legs, and whittled a toenail.

"You theenk that is what a smart man would do, *amigo?*"

"Hell, it's the only logical thing to do!"

Manoel paused in his chiropody. "If

it is logical, then do not do it, *amigo,*" he advised. "Hermanny will expect that. He will have Viéra and his *capitura* ready for you."

"You think Viéra knows he has Mariana?"

Manoel concluded his task and put away the knife. "*Que esperanca!* Sweet chance! That wan Viéra are a human bloodhound. He would hang Hermanny as queek as Manoel, eef he know that. But Viéra cannot see further than his nose, so he is of use to Hermanny. *Não, não, amigo,* you must wait."

"Damn it, man, I *can't* just sit here!"

Manoel shrugged. "Then ride into a trap, *senhor.* Bento Hermanny would like that."

That made sense, much as Randy hated to admit it.

"But time passes, Manoel!" he protested. "If I don't get her . . ."

"*Pacieñcia, amigo.* Patience, I beg of you. We 'ave wine and food for the belly. Is that not all in life? Or mebbe you would like the soft lips of . . ."

"Ah, go to hell!" growled Randy, and walked to the door.

BUT he waited. For a full week he did not leave the cave, although Manoel rode out almost nightly on his own mysterious business. It was the first time in his life that Randy Dent had ever had the time to really think. The first few days were torture, but finally he reconciled himself to Manoel's perverted logic.

Manoel brought him strange stories. Viéra and his *capitura* were combing the countryside. Manoel had found their tracks within a quarter mile of the cave itself. Hermanny, too, was busy. He had made a great fuss over the death of Brito and the other riders, and had offered a large reward for the American—dead. Nothing had been heard of the girl.

Cristino had dropped from sight, and Manoel prophesied that when they located Cristino they would also find Mariana. But Manoel's incredible indifference to the whole situation kept Randy's nerves raw. He grew sullen and morose, and they would have quarreled but for Manoel's everlasting good humor. In the close quarters of the cave, Randy tried to avoid the other. Nights, when Manoel was out prowling the country, he slept, and in the daytime he paced the cave while Manoel snored in his hammock.

One morning Manoel padded into the cave and awakened him.

"*Que sorte!* What luck, *amigo!* I 'ave found where this Cristino are!"

Randy landed on his feet. "Let's go!"

"Damn it, man, I can't just sit here!" Randy said. Manoel shrugged. "Then ride into a trap, senhor. *Benito Hermanny would like that."*

"Whoa, *amigo! Pacieñcia!* It is daylight!"

Then in his loquacious fashion, he explained. The Guarani Frontier was a large place, with many holes in which to hide. But word had come to Manoel that Cristino was holed up in the vicinity of *Bom Fim,* a small border village. But it would not be well to go there, for *Bom Fim* was a tough town, made up of satellites of Hermanny; it was one of the few places along the frontier that Manoel avoided. It would be simple enough, perhaps, to kill Cristino, but while Manoel admitted that would be pleasant in itself, it would not produce Mariana Figuereido.

They were seated at the plank table, eating some of the fresh cooked meat Manoel had brought with him. Randy Dent stared at the other. His heart was singing, and he hadn't felt as hopeful in months.

"It will not be easy to lure that one out of his hole," Manoel was saying. "Cristo has the liver of a leetle chicken. *Que diablo,* I weel theenk of somet'ing."

"This is my problem," Randy said. "I will go to *Bom Fim* alone."

Manoel was tired. "*Puxa!* You would be wan fool, *senhor!*"

Randy smiled. "A smart man would not do it, eh?"

Manoel washed down a mouthful of meat with strong wine.

Que coisa danada! What a damned thing! Only a damn fool would do that, *senhor!*"

"Good!" Randy laughed at him. "If it is not expected of a smart man, it will be a surprise."

Manoel put down his cup with slow deliberation and fixed the Texan with his lone eye.

"*Que diable!* What the devil! You 'ave catched Manoel in hees own trap!" He burst out laughing and slapped his bare leg. "*Puxa!* The *tigre* 'ave become a fox. You are almost so smart as Manoel!" He sobered quickly. "But the risk, *senhor . . .?*"

Randy sprang to his feet and began to pace the cave. He felt like laughing and shouting. The waiting was over and this was to be his show.

"Risk, *hell!* If I can't whip that dirty Cristino, I ought to be killed!"

Manoel leaned against the wall. "*Sim!* That Cristo is ver' dirty, *amigo,* but he is no fool! If you keel Cristo, who then can tell you where is the *senhorita?* Who then can tell about Bento Hermanny an' 'ow he keel Eduardo, an' Nestor Figuereido, an' Pedro Barbosa? An' t'ere is the matter of your money, too, *amigo!* 'Ave you forgot them t'ings?"

Randy stopped his restless pacing. He had forgotten—for the moment.

"I'll bring him out of *Bom Fim* alive!" he swore.

Manoel spread his pudgy hands. "The *tigre* speaking, not the fox. *Amigo,* that are imposseeble. Cristo would make you fight. He 'as not forgot that wan hard slap in the mout' you geeve him w'en he try first to keel *Senhor* Figuereido. He will make you fight, an' you weel 'ave to keel heem or he weel keel you, *Se Deus quizer*— If God will! He 'as made the boast."

Randy Dent stared at this one-eyed bandit and was conscious of an affection such as he had felt for few men. And Manoel, to whom death was such a common thing, was worried. It was as though something in their make-ups had gone out to each other, and had welded into a common bond. It was a good feeling, and the Texan was glad. He crossed the cave and put out his hand.

Manoel grasped it. He, too, was aware of the thing that had grown up between them.

"*Viva, amigo!*" he said with feeling. "*Viva!*"

"Now," said Randy quietly, "tell me about *Bom Fim.*"

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your magazine may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.—*The Publishers.*

A hair rope dropped over the Texan's head and tightened on his throat.

CHAPTER XIII

TO MAKE A MAN TALK

IT was good to be riding through the night once again. Randy rode stirrup to stirrup with Manoel, and a dozen odd men grouped behind them. Everyone knew what his part was to be—but Manoel, though resigned, was dissatisfied. The plan was simple enough; Randy was to ride into *Bom Fim* alone; Cristo, sure of himself, would probably be drawn out of his hole. From that point on, there could be no plan. Only this: if Randy escaped alive with his prisoner, Manoel and his men would cover the retreat. It was little enough, and Manoel didn't like it.

For his own part, Randy tried not to think at all. He counted on the element of surprise to offer some avenue of action. Strangely enough, he was not nervous. Once he got Cristino lined up before him, he'd know what to do.

Manoel, on the other hand, was restless and irritable.

"After I hear the shots," he fumed, "I will wait wan leetle time, then . . ."

"You'll wait until I come tearing out of there," Randy told him. "Otherwise you'll spoil the show."

"You are wan beeg fool, *amigo!*" Manoel cursed bitterly in three languages. "Eef you do not come, I weel keel every wan of those peegs. I weel burn that damn village to the groun'. *Puxa!* I am mad!" He leaned out of the saddle and searched Randy's face. "You 'ave no fear, *amigo?*"

"No," Randy said, "I am not afraid."

Manoel shrugged. *"Gracas a Deus!* Thanks be to God!"

They wound up a small hill and at a signal from Manoel, reined in. In the dark they dismounted, and there was a comforting camaraderie in the heavy breathing, the retching of saddles, and the musical tinkle of bridles. Manoel walked with Randy to the crest, and they stood side by side, watching the winking lights of the village. The faintly sour smell of the man, a blending of horse and man sweat, of wine and stale tobacco, was warmly human.

"You will be careful, *meu amigo?*" pleaded Manoel.

Randy nodded. They shook hands solemnly, then Randy swung into the saddle.

"Good-bye, and thanks," he said.

"Viva, amigo!" cried Manoel. "May God walk with you!"

Randy touched the horse's flanks with his spurs and moved down the slope alone. As he forded the creek at the bottom and rode into the settlement, he was reminded of that night—which now seemed so very long ago—when he had first walked into Böa Vista, the night he met Manoel. Here again were a few daub-and-wattle houses grouped around a square, like card players around a green-baize covered table. Pale smoke spiralled lazily from a couple of chimneys, and although it was close to midnight, a few scrawny cows still browsed in the plaza. At the far end of the single street, a group of horses and mules huddled in front of a barroom.

Randy sat alert in the saddle, his right hand never far from his gun. Once or twice a native passed him, a mere blob of shadow moving beneath the trees, but no one paid him any attention. The night air was heavy, and as Randy cut across the square he saw the distant flash of lightning and heard the rumble of thunder.

He rode slowly past the saloon, dismounted, and tethered his horse to a convenient tree, with a knot that would slip easily to a hurried jerk. He stood a moment, orienting himself, testing the draw of his gun. It was good, this way; whatever happened would be quick, decisive. He breathed deeply. His pulse was steady. Randy knew he was not afraid.

He approached the open doorway, then paused to let his eyes accustom themselves to the lights. "Well, this is the pay-off," he told himself, and with a quick glance up and down the street to make sure he wouldn't be flanked unexpectedly, he stepped inside.

There were eight or ten men crowded around a small bar, and another half dozen at a card table near the entrance. Several of the men glanced up casually and then blinked in surprise, as if they could not believe the evidence of their own eyes. Then one man said:

"Que diablo! Norte Americano!"

The others jerked around by common impulse.

RANDY stepped away from the doorway and moved slowly so that his back was to the wall. He looked levelly into the startled faces, but he did not speak. Neither did the others. With their eyes they followed every movement of his body as he crossed the room and stood in the angle formed where the bar met the wall. From this vantage, he had a clear sweep of the room, and the several doors that led out of it.

"Cervasa!" he ordered in Spanish. "Beer!"

A grubby little barman scuttled over and placed a bottle of lukewarm beer on the counter, then backed hurriedly away. To Randy's intense disappointment Cristino was not in the room. Well, he had not dared to hope for that much luck. He sipped at the pale stuff in his glass. Out of the corner of one eye, he saw a man sidle out of the front door. A moment later another man eased away from the bar and vanished.

Once again, Randy Dent had the sensation of having lived this scene before. It was so much like the incidents his father had told him of the old Texas. Reflection brought a grin to his face, and he was conscious that his smile had a startling effect on his audience. They showed the same amazement a group of hounds might have shown if a rabbit walked into their midst and smirked at them. Randy chuckled and sipped at his beer. He could wait.

The way the tension was building, he knew his wait would not be long. With exaggerated deliberation, the men began to ease away. Suddenly he was aware that a space had been cleared away from the rear door. Trouble, when it came, would come through that doorway. Randy shifted his own position so that the bar would not block the free arc of his gun. He watched the barkeep wipe out a glass. The man's hands were shaking. Finally the glass slipped from his fingers and shattered on the floor. A card player threw himself out of his chair and dived under the table. Randy smiled, in spite of himself, but no one else changed expression. The jittery gambler crawled to his feet and walked out of the bar.

Slowly into the heavy silence crept the far-away sound of hoof beats. The men cocked their heads, listened, and looked at each other. A sigh, subtle as a thought —but something you could feel rather than hear—passed through the bar. Randy kept his head bent, watching the men's feet. He noted the way they drew back and settled on the floor, ready to move swiftly.

Cristino is coming! he told himself.

The horse galloped up the road, circled the building, and as the drumming ceased, spurs clanked over the sill. The door swung open, and Cristino stamped into the room. Randy lifted his grimy glass with his left hand and finished his beer.

Cristino stopped about two paces from the doorway, and stared at the Texan. His close, ferret-shaped features were blank, but his eyes mirrored his distrust of the situation. As Randy had anticipated, his own arrival had been a complete surprise. Cristino moved towards him with the stiff-legged walk of a wary dog.

Randy stepped suddenly away from the bar.

"Cristo!" he said in Spanish. "I have come to take you away!"

The man halted. His moist dark forehead was washboarded in concentration. Randy knew he was afraid—not of the Texan, but of the situation. Once he was sure of his ground, Cristino would act. That slim period of uncertainty was Randy's chance. A blurred montage of impressions swept across his mind: Eduardo with the vultures on his body; the old man lying dead at the end of Cristo's rope; Tuba spread-eagled on the floor; and Mariana. . . .

You can't kill him! he warned himself. *Not yet, not yet!* But now, for the first time in his life, Randy wanted to kill a man. It would be so easy, so justified. Cristino's hand was drawing up toward his gun.

Randy sidestepped and in the same motion, swept out his gun and fired. His shot shattered Cristo's hand as it closed over his gun butt. Before the echo passed, Randy sprang forward, slashed Cristo across the temple with the barrel, and as the man sagged, caught him on his shoulder. Then he spun around and faced the others.

"Do not move!" he warned them in Spanish. "The hills and fields are full of the riders of Manoel. We want only this Cristino, but if I am delayed, you will all be wiped out and your homes burned!"

Cristino was screaming for help. Randy hit him twice more across the head. No one else moved. Because it was something beyond their experience for one man to raid them like this, they were uncertain. Until they could be sure of what was happening, they would not move. So Randy hoped . . . .

To reach his own horse, he would have to pass through them. There wasn't time. Staggering under the burden, he backed out of the rear door. Before he could find Cristino's horse, he heard a cry in the saloon. He saw the horse now and ran toward it. He heaved Cristo across the saddle and mounted behind. The silhouette of a man appeared in the lighted doorway. Randy threw a quick shot, and swung his mount. Cristino made a grab for the reins. Randy hit him at the base of the skull. After that, Cristino moved no more.

BUT Randy had strained his luck. Behind him rose a tumult of shouting and cursing. Randy dug his spurs in pitilessly and headed for the ford. A burst of firing started, and the horse under him screamed and faltered. Randy

freed his feet from the stirrups, but the horse caught himself and plunged down the slope. He was a small gelding and he was tired. *He'll never make that hill under his load,* Randy told himself.

Manoel and his riders were waiting at the creek. As Randy slowed, Manoel waved him on.

"*Vamoose!*" he roared. "We will hold off these others."

Randy was too weary to argue. He let the gelding choose his own pace up the slope to the woods. He heard behind him the yelling and shooting at the ford, and once the half-human scream of a horse. Manoel's men were outnumbered two to one, but they were on the advantageous side of the creek. Before he reached the wooded crest, the firing had ceased. He pulled the worn horse under a large tree, put the muzzle of his gun against Cristino's temple, and waited. If Manoel had failed, Cristino, at least, would gain nothing.

Five minutes later Manoel and his men cantered into the grove.

"*Viva!*" he greeted Randy. "You 'ave succeed. Now we go. *Não?*"

Randy glanced up where the pale moon glowed above a gnarled tree limb.

"No," he said grimly, "we'll waste no more time. Give me a rope."

He yanked his prisoner off the saddle and propped him against the horse. Cristino shook his head to clear it, and stared around at the grim faces. Randy went steadily ahead with his job. He fashioned a rough hangman's knot in the rawhide rope Manoel passed him, and started to slide it over Cristino's head. Cristino let out a bleat of terror and tried to fight. Randy cold bloodedly slammed him in the stomach, and as the man jack-knifed, slipped the rope around his neck. He tossed the other and over the heavy limb above and took a turn around the saddle. Then he caught a handful of Cristino's shirt and shook him.

"Cristo," he said quietly, "you're going to talk. First, you're going to tell me where *Senhorita* Figuereido is . . ."

"That I cannot tell!" babbled Cristino. "I do not . . ."

". . . then you're going to tell me who shot Eduardo!" Randy interrupted him.

Cristino wagged his head. "These things I do not know!" he began.

Randy pushed Manoel out of the way and grabbed the bridle. He started to walk the horse. Cristo's frantic scream was cut to a rasping gurgle as his toes cleared the ground. Randy let him dangle a moment, then backed the gelding until Cristino's feet were on the ground.

"Talk!" he demanded.

Cristino sagged limply and his eyes bulged out from his purple face. He sucked air brokenly, but when he met Randy's eyes, he again shook his head.

"O. K.!" Randy said. "We'll try again!"

This time he waited longer. Manoel touched his arm.

"*Que va! Amigo,* if you would keel this wan, I know a trick that are slower."

"He's going to talk if I stretch his neck to that limb," Randy grated.

Manoel shrugged. "You are wan ver' tough *hombre, amigo,*" he said admiringly. "That I did not know."

Cristino was unconscious when Randy let him down the next time. A hatful of water from the creek revived him. While he was lying on the ground, Randy again took the bridle.

"Are you ready, Cristino?"

Cristino hesitated, but before the rope tightened, he gave his head a perceptible nod. Manoel and Randy bent together to catch his feeble words.

It was Manoel who straightened first. "*Sim, sim!* I know that place," he shouted. "*Gracas a Deus!*"

THEY bound the prisoner securely and tied him onto a horse. Randy and Manoel rode in advance, while Cristino was sandwiched between two of Manoel's raiders. The rest of the men brought up the rear so that the flank was well protected. Now a cloud drifted over the moon, and the shadows closed in, but the men knew the country and they pressed forward at a good speed. Only Cristino's terrified whimperings sounded above the friendly retch of leather and the drumbeat of hooves.

Randy turned in his saddle. Reaction was setting in, and he wanted to get the business over. "How far is this place?"

Staggering under the burden, he backed out of the rear door.

Manoel made an inclusive gesture with his arm. "Some distance. It are a small *ritiro*—a sort of substation—on one corner of Hermanny's fazenda." He glanced over his shoulder to where Cristino rode between his men. "I am theenk of that money Cristo tell us that Bento Hermanny hide in his house. Pairhap, *amigo*, we should first go there?"

"To hell with the money!" fumed Randy. "That girl is more important!"

Manoel shrugged. "*Voce é bobo!* You are wan fool, *amigo!* You 'ave promeese not even to kees that skinny little *senhorita*—so why you worry about few minutes? *Puxa!* Now that money, *senhor*, she are ver' scarce."

"I can't steal that money, even if it was stolen from me!" Randy snapped. "We'll find a way of getting it legally."

"*Que esperanca!* Sweet chance!" muttered the one-eyed bandit. "'Ave you decide w'at 'appens aftair you get the preety *senhorita?*"

"I'll get the hell out of this country."

"What about the *senhorita, amigo?*"

"Well, what about her? She's her own boss."

"*Puxa!*" snorted Manoel. "You leave her 'ere?"

"There's nothing else I can do about it," Randy growled. "I'll be working the rest of my life back home to repay that damned money Hermanny stole from me."

Manoel was silent a long time as he digested that. Finally he reined his horse up close to Randy's so they could talk confidentially.

"*Ohla!* Why you no stay 'ere with Manoel, *meu amigo?* There are much to be done—*Se Deus quizer!* If God wills!

You would mak' ver' good bandit, *amigo.* You 'ave much courage, almos' like Manoel, an' mebbe after while you get smart, too, lak heem."

"No dice," Randy said flatly. "I'm going back home and take my medicine."

Manoel heaved a mighty sigh. "Mebbe the skinny leetle *senhorita* mak' you the mind change, *senhor.*" He chuckled softly as if some pleasant memory amused him. "Ah, *amigo,* woman she are wonderful! W'en she are in luv', she change everyt'ing, even her instinct. Because of you the leetle *senhorita* she are come over the Manoel's side. It are wonderful!"

"Because of me? You're crazy in the head! Hell, I never even discussed your business with her."

"Discuss, bah!" snorted Manoel. "Wan does not reach a female through the head, but through the 'eart, *amigo!* A man 'e *theenk;* a woman, she *feel.* That is always so. W'en the *senhorita* see you are 'urt, she clamor queek for the *rights of man.* For her instinct, aristocracy are the ordair of theengs, but now aftair all thees year, she *feel* Manoel are at last right." He shrugged expressively. "Now she fight on our side, for the *justice* of man are only the *charity* of woman. *Gracas a Deus!*"

"I don't know what in hell you're talking about," growled Randy.

"*Que milagre!* What wonder!" chuckled the bandit and lapsed into silence.

They rode steadily for another hour to halt finally on a fringe of mato. The *ritiro,* Manoel explained, lay just over the next knoll, and it would not be prudent to ride further. He made one more eloquent plea to raid Hermanny's home first and get the money. It was only a short gallop, and he argued that if they grabbed the girl first, it would mean they would have to bolt for the border.

BUT Randy was adamant. Manoel thrust out his thick lower lip and sulked like a school boy.

"The Gringo, he are givin' the ordairs thees time," he grumbled, "but it are wan ver', ver' much mistake. *Puxa!*"

"After I get Mariana loose, you can do all the damn thievin' you like," Randy told him. "Now let's dope out this raid."

Manoel changed his tactics at once. He pointed out that it would not be well for them all to ride up to the *ritiro* at the same time; there was always the danger of a trap. In this Randy agreed. So it was decided that Randy would take two men and proceed on foot. Manoel would cover their attack with the main body of his riders, while the remainder would guard Cristino in the mato.

Randy and the two men who were to accompany him tethered their horses. The moon was still hazy, but Randy's eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness. He walked over to where Cristino humped in his saddle. At sight of the Texan, Cristino began babbling: *"Acuda, minha Nossa Senhora . . !"*

Randy scowled at the prisoner. "Cristo," he said grimly, "you've still got one slim chance of getting out of this alive. You're small fry. It's Hermanny we want, not you. Help us prove him guilty of the crimes we know he's committed, and I'll turn you loose when it's over. Otherwise . . ." He made a circular motion with his finger around his neck.

Cristo understood. *"Sim, sim, sim!"* he whimpered.

Randy turned away and nodded to his men. Manoel rode out with him to the open campo, then reined it.

"Viva! Amigo, 'ave no fear. Manoel, he will tak care of everyt'ing!"

Randy laughed. O. K., pardner. Just be damn sure we're not surprised."

"Poof! Manoel, he are here—*Gracas a Deus!*"

Randy had a momentary flash of distrust, then it passed. With a nod, he signaled to his men, and stepped out into the night.

CHAPTER XIV

A PROMISE TO BREAK

THE three men moved silently through the tall grass, so close their shadows blended into one. Within a half hour they topped the small knoll, and below

them in a little valley was the *ritiro.* Randy could see the yellowish patch of light in the solitary window, and the shadow of a small fence around the building.

One of his men whispered in Spanish: "There is a dog there, *senhor!* Him I can smell!"

"We're down wind from him," said Randy.

"*Sim!* But it would be better if he were stilled. I will attend, if the *senhor* please?"

Randy thought of Mariana held in there and what a shooting scrape might mean to her. He nodded.

"Go ahead—we'll cover you."

The man stretched full length on the ground and slithered into the grass. Instantly he was gone. Randy sat down and checked his gun. It was so still in the darkness that he could hear the ticking of his watch. The draperies were taken off the moon, lighting the scene in a pale, eerie light. His whole mind was concentrated on getting Mariana safely out of there, but vague questions hovered on the edge of his consciousness; questions he didn't want to face. Perhaps he should have taken Manoel's advice and settled with Hermanny first. Damn it, the money was rightfully his! Well, it was too late now. He was committed to his course of action; he could do nothing but proceed.

The rider reappeared out of the night, and his white teeth flashed in a ready grin.

"The mongrel is quiet," he reported. "There are four men in the shack. Two sleeps. *Puxa!* They will all sleep shortly. Eh, *amigo?*"

Randy shook his head. "No killing—if it can be helped!" he ordered. "We'll tie 'em up and head for the border."

The two men exchanged glances and shrugged in unison. It was plain they thought the *Norte Americano* was crazy, but they would obey. Randy gestured towards the hut, and they followed him obediently.

Randy wasted no time. He halted about ten paces from the single door, drew his revolver, and nodded at his men. He took a short run and planted his foot against the door. As it crashed inward, he sprang through the opening. The surprise was complete.

Two men were crouched around an old table, playing cards. Two others were asleep in their hammocks. Only one offered any resistance, and Randy felled him with a blow on the head. The others hoisted their hands. Leaving them to the care of his men, Randy dove across the room to where Mariana was tied into a grass hammock.

At sight of him, her large eyes filled with tears. "Oh, my Randy!" she cried. "You 'ave come! I knew it, I knew it!"

He resisted the impulse to kiss her, and severed her bonds. She was grimy and disheveled, but Randy Dent did not notice. Never, he was sure, had he seen anything quite so lovely. Tenderly, he helped her to her feet. She balanced uncertainly a moment, then leaned heavily against him.

"My foot!" she said jerkily. "She is asleep!"

Randy hesitated, then: "Here—I'll carry you!" He holstered his gun and picked her up in his arms. *Light as a feather,* he thought. She put one arm around his neck.

The other pair had made short shrift of the guards. They trussed the four of them up in separate hammocks, and tied them to stakes so that it would be a long time before they could work close enough together to help release each other.

"That's enough!" Randy growled. "Let's get the hell out of here!"

They stepped outside. The fickle moon was again veiled, and the valley was cloaked in a thick murk.

"You have horses, Randy?" Mariana whispered in his ear.

"They're up on the knoll—with Manoel," Randy told her. "He helped me, y'know."

She nodded. "Yes, I know. He is a strange one, that Manoel. We owe him much, and yet. . ."

"Yet?"

She shivered. "I'm afraid I do not understand him entirely, Randy. But, oh!—I am so glad to see you!"

He liked that. "I'm terribly sorry about the *fazenda,*" he said. "You were

right—Hermanny outsmarted me. I'm outlawed."

She put a finger over his mouth. "It does not matter. Do not speak of those things now. Somehow, we will work it out."

"No, I'm afraid not, Mariana. I'm going home." He was walking across the valley now toward the knoll. He was wondering why Manoel did not show up with the horses, when he heard the drumming of hooves.

"Who's that?" gasped the girl.

"Manoel. Thank God he had sense enough to come on down."

Now he could see the horsemen sweeping down the slope at a dead gallop. A moment later, a beam of light circled and held him.

"O. K!" he growled irritably. "Douse that damn light, Manoel!"

The horsemen surrounded them.

"*Para la!*" shouted a voice from the darkness behind the light. "Stop there! You are under our guns!"

"*O meo Deus!*" cried Mariana. "The *capitura!*"

Captain Viéra himself leaned out of the saddle and disarmed the Texan. Randy set Mariana on her feet. In the blinding glare of the flashlights, her face was bloodless. For his own part, Randy's brain refused to function. His whole body had gone numb.

Viéra dismounted and walked over, holding his gun on Randy. Ringed in by the *capitura*, resistance would be fatal. Randy shrugged and drew back his shoulders.

"Well," said the captain in Spanish, "it was a hard ride, but we got you. Where is that man Cristino whom you kidnaped?"

Some of the numbness went out of Randy's brain. At least the *capitura* hadn't found Cristino. That was a point to remember.

"Captain Viéra!" cried Mariana. "You must listen to me! Cristino kidnaped me and held me a prisoner so that Ra—so that *Senhor* Dent could be trapped. Bento Hermanny was behind. . ."

"Silence!" thundered the captain. "Once before I listened to your tears, *senhorita*, and it cost me the life of my lieutenant! This time the *gringo* will not get away! I will hear no more!" He took a pair of handcuffs from beneath his coat. "Your wrists, *senhor!*" he snapped at Randy.

Randy backed up a step, then glanced at the ring of guns. It was hopeless. Slowly, he extended his hands. The clutch of steel was the most depressing sensation he had ever endured. He heard Viéra sigh softly with relief as the ratchets tightened.

"Now you will mount in front of one of my men!" Viera ordered.

"Wait!" pleaded Randy. "You asked about Cristino. I will take you to him—on one condition."

"*Que diablo!* You are in no position to bargain!" barked the captain. "You are a murderer. We deal swiftly with your kind here in Brazil!"

"Are you also going to pin the killing of Pedro Barbosa on me? And Eduardo? And Nestor Figuereido, too?"

Viéra bristled. "For the murder of Lieutenant Brito, we have a sufficient, *senhor!*"

"But those others," insisted Randy. "I can prove who killed those men. Will you not listen?"

Viéra hesitated. Randy pressed his slight advantage.

"Captain, Cristino has confessed to those things. It was he who killed Barbosa at the order of Bento Hermanny—for a price. He was with Hermanny when Bento murdered Eduardo to be rid of him, and in turn robbed me of twenty-five thousand dollars, which he had paid me for my seven bulls. Cristino will tell you these things!"

"*Ohla!* It is likely!" sneered Viéra.

"But it's God's truth!" argued Randy. "Take these cuffs off and I'll take you to Cristo. Only one thing—he is not important, and I have promised him his life if he speaks the truth against Hermanny."

Viéra shook his head. "I do not believe these things!"

Randy had a sinking feeling of hopelessness. "Then, like Brito, you are in league with Bento Hermanny!"

Viéra slapped him across the face with the back of his hand.

"*Para la!* I am in league with no one, *senhor*, but the law! If these things were

true, I would arrest Bento Hermanny as quick as yourself! But you are a criminal and have no standing."

"But damn it!" shouted Randy. "Cristino is waiting less than a mile from here! If you are honest, you'll listen to him! But he's got to believe I'm working with you, or he will not speak the truth! You speak of Brito—was he not found with Hermanny's own men! Did you ever think why that was so?"

Viéra paced back and forth, stroking his jaw.

Mariana cried: "You have me as a hostage, Captain! Are you afraid to learn the truth?"

Viéra whirled and grabbed his reins. "Mount!" he ordered brusquely. "I believe the *Norte Americano* lies! We will see!" He swung into the saddle. "If this is a trick, *Gringo,* myself I will shoot you!" He waited while Randy was drawn up in front of one of his men, and took station beside him.

The uncertain moon had sunk low in the west, and already the eastern horizon was tinged with a cold, steely glow. At an order from Viéra, the cavalcade moved briskly up the slope toward the clump of mato.

"*Well,*" mused Randy, "*this will be the pay-off.*" He found himself hoping Manoel wouldn't try any trick rescue. Viéra was riding at his elbow, his gun out. Mariana had been swallowed in the riders behind.

In a few moments they entered the clump of mato, and the gloom was opaque. The men instinctively drew close together so that the whole band moved in a compact knot. An ambush here would be fatal. Randy turned his head.

"My men are close now, Captain," he told Viéra. "Let me call a warning so that there will be no fighting."

Viéra placed the gun muzzle in Randy's side. "Go ahead and speak! If this is an ambush, you will be the first to die."

Randy shrugged and called out: "Hold, men! It is *Senhor* Dent—the *Gringo*. Come into the open carefully. Do not shoot!"

The *capitura* reined in, waiting. Randy called again, but the woods gave back only the sound of his own voice. Twice more he shouted. Silence."

Viéra gave a mocking laugh. "Liar!" he jerked. Then to his men: "Dismount and search the mato. Kill any who do not surrender at first call!"

As the *capitura* spread out on foot, he prodded Randy with the gun.

"Did you think to fool me with that silly story?"

Randy was too furious to reply. He cursed himself for trusting Manoel when there was money involved. Damn, he had had a premonition that something like this would happen.

"Ah, to hell with it!" he growled. "Let's get this business over with, Captain."

One of the men came running up the trail. "There are horsemen coming across the campo at a gallop!" he reported excitedly.

Viéra cursed. He barked his orders so fast that Randy couldn't follow him. But the men understood. They melted into the surrounding gloom like dark wraiths. The rider behind Randy spurred his horse back into the mato.

As from the shadows of the mato they watched the newcomers gallop up the hill, Randy felt a sudden upsurge of hope. But he killed it quickly. Now any attempt by Manoel to effect a rescue would result in death to them all. He was half tempted to cry a warning, but by the time he thought of it, it was too late. Viéra's men suddenly flashed their lights. Randy's spirits sank to an all-time low.

It was not Manoel, but Bento Hermanny and a dozen of his men!

They reined up sharply at Viéra's call, and then all dismounted and formed around the Texan.

BENTO HERMANNY made no effort to conceal his pleasure at seeing the Texan manacled. His eyes held an unnatural glitter, and his customary pokerface was wreathed in a broad smile.

"Congratulations, Captain Viéra!" he boomed. "You have done a fine job. One of the *cabaclos* just came up to the house and told me of your success. I came at the gallop, for I did not want to miss the kill."

"There will be no kill without a trial," Viéra said stiffly.

"*Trial?*" thundered Hermanny, scowling. "Since when do we dignify murderers and cattle-thieves with trials in the Mato Grosso? Have you forgotten what happened to Brito and. . ."

"You're in one hell of a hurry to get me out of the way," Randy cut in. "Afraid to see me get a hearing?"

Hermanny reached up and tried to drag Randy out of the saddle. Randy leaned over and slashed downward with his shackled wrists in a chopping motion. The chain tore across Hermanny's face and sent him reeling. Before he could draw his gun, Viéra sprang between them.

"*Para la!* Stop there!" he barked. "This man is a prisoner of the police."

Hermanny mopped the blood from his face with a handkerchief. "Captain, you will regret this interference!" he growled. "I am not without influence. Nor will I be cheated of my revenge! This *Gringo* is in league with Manoel Silva—that you know, for he has admitted as much. He has killed Cristino, my *capitaz*. . . ."

"You're a liar!" Randy snapped. "Cristo is not dead!"

Hermanny slowly took the handkerchief from his face. "I know differently!" he said.

Randy laughed mirthlessly. "Cristo is in good hands, Hermanny. He has told how you paid him to murder Pedro Barbosa so you could grab his *fazenda;* he has told how you shot Eduardo to get him out of the way and rob me at the same time. He has—"

Hermanny shouted: "Enough! I will take no more of this abuse! Captain Viéra, you will turn this murderer over to my men to stone to death, or we will take him from you!"

From the corner of his eye, Randy saw the grim faces of Hermanny's riders. Either by instinct or by preconceived orders, they had formed a ring around the *capitura.* Randy estimated they outnumbered the police by two to one. He glimpsed the pale features of Mariana in the background. She was too terrified to speak.

Viéra was as hard as ever. "*Senhor* Hermanny, I warn you—we are the *capitura.* This *Norte Americano* will die, it is true, but he will die by the law! We will fight to preserve that justice!"

Hermanny backed slowly away, his eyes on Viéra. The atmosphere was electric. Randy was gripped with a sort of detached fascination. The approaching dawn filled the woods with strange shadows. It was obvious to all that Bento Hermanny meant to mob the prisoner; it was equally obvious that Viéra meant what he said. Yet to the Texan the final result would be the same. He had the sick feeling of wishing the whole damn business was over. He was too weary to be afraid. Even the men were held enthralled by the duel of personalities; every eye was focussed on the two leaders.

"You have one more chance, Captain Viéra," Hermanny said grimly. "Turn this man over to us, and I will send word to Rio that you are to be promoted for your good work. Otherwise, we will take him, and I will have you broken. He is even now on my property, and I am within my legal rights to destroy him!"

Viéra slowly shook his head. "He is a prisoner of the *capitura!*"

"He is a murderer and—"

"*An' wan ver', ver' good fran' of Manoel!*" cut in a familiar voice from the surrounding gloom.

The crowd stiffened with surprise, and before anyone could move, Manoel stepped into the clearing. "Please to not move, *senhores,*" he urged placidly. "My men do not want to shoot so many nize mans all at wan time." He turned his one good eye on the astounded Texan—and winked. "Cristo, he want ver' much to take me ovair to *Senhor* Hermanny's house. Manoel, he could not mak' resist."

Viéra said slowly. "You have this Cristino—alive?"

Manoel shrugged indifferently. "*Sim, sim!* He are alive, more or less. Sometime that wan he are ver' obstinate. Mebbe you lak make talk with heem, *Senhor* Captain?"

Viéra sucked in a deep breath, nodded. Manoel crooked his finger, and two of his men herded Cristino out of the shadows. Cristino was gagged, and he looked considerably the worse for wear.

But—and for it Randy thanked his God!—the man was still alive.

Manoel walked over to Cristino and took out a long knife. He stropped it deliberately against his bare thigh and then with a slashing motion, cut the gag from the prisoner's mouth. After that, he placed the point against Cristo's windpipe.

"CRISTO," Manoel said conversationally, "this ver' nize *capitan,* he lak to hear you mak talk, *faz favor.* If you pleaze!"

Cristino fell to his knees and began to babble. Randy couldn't follow it, but he saw the reaction on Captain Viéra. He caught the name Barbosa, and the name of Eduardo . . . and his eyes were still held rigid on the speaker when the gun roared. He saw the small dark hole appear in Cristo's forehead, and then another shot crashed, and Randy jerked his head around in time to see Bento Hermanny fold over and slide on his face in the dust.

Manoel was holding the butt of his Smith and Wesson; he hadn't bothered to draw it from his open-ended holster. Manoel was shaking his head.

Puxa! Manoel grows careless—he should have watch that Bento until Cristo have finish." He looked at the grim face of Captain Viéra. "For it I am regret, *meu capitan.* That wan Cristo, 'e have many story to tell."

Viéra stroked his chin. "What he said was made conclusive by Bento Hermanny's action," he admitted. "Otherwise I would not have believed it possible for these things to be!" He pursed his lips. "For his death, I cannot condemn you, Manoel, but for other things, I must arrest you. . . ."

"*Muito obrigado!* Thanks, *senhor,*" Manoel said with gentle sarcasm. "But the arrest, she mus' wait. 'Ave Manoel not done you a kindness, *senhor?*"

Viéra looked actually embarrassed. Mariana tumbled from her horse and ran over to him.

"Captain!" she cried. "You must release the *Americano!* It has been proven that he is without guilt."

Viéra turned without a word and unlocked the cuffs. Randy climbed down from his horse and stood rubbing his wrists. Mariana looked up at him with tears of relief in her eyes. He grinned down at her, uncertain of what he should say.

Manoel gave a disgusted snort, "*Puxa!*" he said to no one in particular. "The *Gringo* he 'ave made wan promeese not to kiss the leetle *senhorita. O meu Deus!* W'at a fool!"

Something snapped in Randy's head. He gave a silly laugh and swept Mariana into his arms. She came willingly, as if she had waited just for that. When he recovered his senses, he found the men grinning at him. He felt his ears growing red and tingling from embarrassment.

Manoel howled with laughter. "*Gracas a Deus!* I am 'appy! For a wedding present, *meu amigo,* Manoel he geeve you thee five nize bulls he got hid away."

Randy had forgotten about the bulls in the general excitement. "Thanks, Manoel," he said. "But I'm afraid I can't accept. Those bulls were not mine, and if Captain Viéra can recover them legally for me, I'll have to send them back to Texas. There is the matter of the money Bento stole. . ."

"Bah!" growled Manoel. "Manoel he weel geeve you money, too." He reached under the fringe of his ridiculous trousers and withdrew an enormous roll of bills. Thrusting them into Randy's nerveless hands, he went on: "*Que diablo!* What the devil! You mus' not send those ver' good bulls out of this country. We 'ave need for them 'ere. *Puxa!* Send the money to thees Texas, an' keep thee bulls at the leetle *senhorita's.* Some day, mebbe, Manoel weel send over some ver' nize cows to play weet those bulls." He chuckled at the expression on their faces. "Now, everybody she are 'appy. So—Manoel Jose Antonio Diniz Felippe Carlos Sebastião Francisco Silva, his work she are done 'ere in the Mato Grosso. He go now back to Paraguay where the fat Conchita she wait for 'im." He heaved a mighty sigh. "Ah, *meu amigos,* womans she are wonderful! Is it not so?"

Viéra took a step forward. "Manoel, I cannot permit. . ."

MARIANA caught his arm. "Captain Viéra, look at me!" The chief of the *capitura* turned and looked into her shining eyes. "You, too, are a married man. You have done your work; you have found out who is responsible for the trouble and tragedy here in the Paradise. If it were not for Manoel Silva, we would all be without homes. Now, Manoel is. . ." She nodded towards the spot where Manoel had been standing but an instant before.

Manoel had vanished.

Viéra scowled, grabbed his horse, and flung himself into the saddle. He leaned down and offered his hand to the Texan. "*Senhor,* I apologize. May I wish you good luck—you and your lovely *senhorita?*"

Randy grasped his hand. "Can't you give Manoel a break, Captain?"

Viéra's frown looked strangely humorous. "That one is a bandit!" he said sternly. "We will ride north in search of him!"

Randy started to object, but Mariana silenced him with a gesture. Viéra shouted something to his men; they threw the bodies of Bento and Cristo across two saddles, and herding Hermanny's riders before them, galloped northward across the campo. Mariana watched them go, a faint smile on her lips.

"Do not worry for Manoel Silva," she said softly. "Remember—as does Captain Viéra—the border is not north, but *south!*" She sighed and leaned her head on his shoulder. "Oh, my Randy, just think! There will be no more trouble in the Paradise."

Randy stood watching the riders sweep across the rich campo. A warm shaft of sun peeked over the fringe of jungle and bathed the scene in a golden glow. He felt again that breathless sensation of a new world stretching out before him. *Paradise Valley*—truly a paradise! Peace had come here at long last, and the future held only promise.

"Randy!" Mariana whispered. "Must you go away from here?"

A soft strand of hair brushed his cheek. He stared at the huge roll of bills still clutched in his hands. It was rightfully his: Bento had stolen it from him, and Manoel had merely recovered it. He could sent it back to Slim Jim in Texas, and his responsibility was over. He was free again, and here was a great land of promise.

"Well," he said slowly, "Manoel gave me this money as a wedding present. However, I made myself a promise that I would go. . ."

She smiled up into his face. "But my Randy, you 'ave already break one promise—the promise you would not again kiss me." She stood before him on tiptoes. "Please, my Randy—break it some more?"

Randy roared with laughter and shoved the bills into his pockets. "Hell's bells, will I? This may make an awful liar out of me, but. . ."

Mariana didn't give him a chance to finish.

A Fact Story

Sergeant Manuel de la Rosa—now in his hundred and third year—who fought with Juarez and was a member of the firing squad which executed the defeated Maximilian of Mexico.

He Shot The Emperor

By WALTER ALDRICH TENNEY

I FIRST saw him on the street in Mexico City, leading a small detachment of aged veterans in a holiday parade. A man standing beside me said, "Notice that little old man wearing the sergeant's stripes?"

"Yes," I said. "What about him?"

"He's the guy that shot Maximilian."

"Says you!" I smiled skeptically. "That was three quarters of a century ago. Those men are all dead."

"Except this one," he replied. "You wouldn't think it, seeing how straight he is and the vigorous way he marches, but he is now over a hundred and two years old."

"What is his name?" I asked.

"Manuel de la Rosa."

I obtained the veteran's address, and a few days later visited him in his home. He greeted me with characteristic Mexican courtesy and, after introducing myself, I said, "You were pointed out to me in the parade the other day, and I was told that you fought with the forces of Benito Juarez against the army of Napoleon III."

"*Si, señor,* I had that honor," he replied. "I took part in the first battle against the French and in many others during the four years struggle, including the siege of Queretero which ended Maximilian's empire."

Author's note—At this writing, December 22nd, 1942, Manuel de la Rosa is still living and in vigorous health.

"I understand you were in the army many years," I said.

"Nearly half my life," said he. "I got the idea of becoming a soldier when I was a young boy. My father was a carpenter in Zacatecas and taught me his trade, and while I worked with him for several years I never lost my desire to join the army. Finally trouble arose within our government and Juarez resigned his office as head of the Supreme Court. Later he proclaimed himself Temporary Constitutional President and there was war. I believed Juarez was fighting for the rights and liberties of the people and I wanted to help. So, in 1860, when I was twenty years of age, I enlisted. I was assigned to the 15th Battalion of Infantry. My pay in those days," he said with a humorous smile, "was 31 centavos a day. It wasn't much but I was content. The illusion of glory blinded me to the stern realities of bloodshed and war.

"The war continued for two more years, two years of strife and bloodshed between the opposing factions of our own people, and then, in 1862, the French army landed in Mexico. With our opponents so strongly reinforced our prospects of success seemed small, but Juarez persisted with dogged determination."

"During your long service," I said, "you doubtless had some eventful experiences."

"*Si, señor, muchos,*" said he. "Hardships and weariness and wounds, but I was serving my country, that was my reward. One event comes to mind at this moment, one in which I took no little pride. In the battle of April 17th, 1862, the flag-bearer of my battalion was killed and the colors captured by the French. The sight of our flag in the hands of the enemy, seeing them trailing my country's ensign in the dirt, affected me deeply.

"SOME time later I chanced to see that flag tied to the wheel of a French gun-carriage. As the fight went on a small body of our troops took refuge in the corner of a church that had been partly destroyed by artillery fire. Finally the fighting ceased, but that French cannon with our flag tied to it still stood on a little hill about five hundred yards away. I didn't know whether the gun crew had remained near it or not, but an irresistible urge to recover that flag took possession of me.

"I started out and, crawling on my belly, taking advantage of whatever shelter I could find, stopping often to look and listen, I finally reached the hilltop unobserved. As I took that flag in my hands a thrill of joy went through me and I found my tears falling on its folds. I hid it in the breast of my tunic and started back, but I hadn't gone far before I was seen and bullets began to whiz about me. One got me in the leg and another grazed my ribs but, *gracias a Dios,* the wounds were not serious and I got back to my comrades alive. I told nobody where I had been or what I had done, but I carried that flag hidden under my coat for a long, long time. It was a sort of talisman of good luck. When I left the army, in 1908, I delivered it to General Gonzales Cosio, then Secretary of War."

"What do you consider the most important engagement in which you took part?" I inquired.

The old soldier's eyes, now somewhat dulled by age, sparkled with renewed brilliance as he replied, "The battle of the 5th of May, 1862, in Puebla, when 4,000 Mexican soldiers under General Zaragoza defeated the French legions. Ah, *señor,* that was one terrific fight! The invaders fought courageously, and they outnumbered us, but we were determined to win or die in the effort. Our men fought with the ferocity of tigers. Charge after charge we made with the bayonet. My battalion suffered almost complete annihilation. Of the 1,500 men composing it but 35 remained alive when the battle ended. These heavy losses made us very sad, yet he were naturally proud of our hard-won victory.

"But we couldn't hold what we had won. Three days later the French attacked again and, after a long siege, Puebla was taken. President Juarez abandoned the capital and, soon after, the French took possession of Mexico

City. The survivors of the 15th Battalion were transferred to the First Regiment of Nueva Leon. A few days later the regiment was called out for inspection, and when they were formed the general said:

'Those men of the 15th Battalion—one step forward.'

"We advanced, wondering what was coming, yet with a feeling of confidence, knowing that we had been faithful to our duty. The general spoke a few words of commendation to the group, and then read an order promoting three of us—Antonio Guerrero, Cleofas Gonzales, and myself—to the rank of sergeant. You can imagine, *señor,* that was a proud moment for us.

"But my pleasure was soon overshadowed by the knowledge of our serious situation. Our president was a fugitive, our capital abandoned to the invaders, their armies waging relentless war against us. But our cause was just, we couldn't yield, so the war went on for another two years. Then, in 1864, Maximilian arrived and was crowned Emperor. And now a foreign ruler, backed by three European powers—France, Austria, and Belgium—sat in the Castle of Chapultepec. Ah, *señor,* those were days to try our courage! Money was scarce, sometimes we lacked food, sometimes we lacked ammunition, still we held on."

MANUEL DE LA ROSA paused and a far-away look came into his eyes, as if he were visioning again those trying times of his youth. Presently he rose, opened an old wooden chest, and took out photographs of himself and his comrades in arms, and official documents which had been presented to him by the Minister of National Defense and by the President of the Republic in recognition of his services. He also showed me a number of medals which he had received at various times. One bears the inscription, *The country rewards its valiant sons, May 5th, 1862;* another, *Defending the City of Puebla, contributing to the glorious triumph over the French army, May 5th, 1862;* a third, *Defenders of the Republic from 1863;* and a fourth, *Campaign against the Mayas. Reward of the State of Yucatan.*

"Two of these," said he, "were pinned on my breast by President Juarez, and the other two by General Porfirio Diaz."

He returned his treasures to the chest and sat down again. Then, turning to me with a modest expression on his face, he said, "I will recite a poem for you," and proceeded to repeat some ten stanzas of verse of his own composition, commemorating the famous battle of the 5th of May at Puebla. "You know," said he, "one of the principal streets in this city is named Cinco de Mayo in honor of that victory, and the 5th of May is a national holiday celebrated annually throughout the republic."

"I am chiefly interested, *señor,*" I said, "in the capture and execution of Maximilian, in which I understand you had a prominent part. Of course I have read the history but, if it is not intruding unduly on your privacy, I would like to hear your own account of those events."

"It is a sad story, *señor,*" the veteran replied, "but I am quite willing to tell you whatever I can. Of course you know that after the Civil War in the United States ended, that government induced Napoleon III to take his army out of Mexico. The Emperor was left with one regiment of Hungarian cavalry, one corps of infantry, the Austrian mounted police, and the Mexican troops under the Mexican generals, Miramon, Marquez, Mendez, and Mejia—in all about 16,000 men. Juarez had four times as many. Maximilian then thought that he also should leave the country, in fact, he did start for the coast but was persuaded to turn back. It seems his fatal weakness was allowing himself to be too easily influenced, putting too much faith in the judgment and promises of others.

"On his return to the capital he sent Antonio Garcia to Juarez to propose a truce and a national election, to let the people decide whether they wanted an empire or a republic. He would accept their decision, whichever it was, and if they chose an empire, Juarista leaders would be given prominent places in the government. But Juarez refused. In his

mind the matter was already settled. The republic must be saved, and he was now more confident than ever in his ability to do it. He gave orders for taking the town of Queretero.

"Word of his intention reached Maximilian. He left the foreign troops to guard Mexico City and marched to the defense of Queretero with the force under the four Mexican generals. They arrived on the 19th of February, 1867, and the Emperor established his headquarters in the *Convento de la Cruz*."

"I am inclined to believe that Maximilian realized the hopelessness of the situation," I said, "but doubtless his pride in the honor of the Hapsburgs impelled him to struggle against such overwhelming odds."

"No doubt it is so, *señor*. Anyway, soon after he reached the town our forces arrived, among them my regiment under General Sostenes Rocha. General Escobedo was in command of the entire force. Finding himself surrounded by superior numbers, Maximilian tried to send for the Hungarian regiment, but his messengers were captured. Some time later his forces made a surprise attack with fixed bayonets. Our troops were scattered and, in the night, Marquez with a few men got through. But Marquez disobeyed orders. He heard that General Diaz was attacking Puebla and, instead of returning to Queretero with the Hungarian cavalry, he went with them to Puebla. He found that the city had already surrendered and turned back, but Diaz pursued, scattered the cavalry, captured the cannon, and marched on Mexico City.

"AS THE days went by," the old soldier continued, "there were numbers of engagements in which both sides lost heavily, and finally Maximilian and his generals decided to try to break through and return to the capital. General Mendez led a furious charge. Our lines opened and let them in, then we closed up and surrounded them. Maximilian's force had been reduced to 4,000 while ours had increased to 40,000. His ammunition was running low, and both soldiers and citizens were threatened with starvation. They were driven to the necessity of eating the flesh of horses and dogs.

"In this crisis, Colonel Miguel Lopez, a Spanish-American who had joined Maximilian when he arrived in Mexico, advised him to try to make terms with our commander. Maximilian must have known that more fighting was useless. He was really a kind-hearted man, and probably didn't want to cause needless bloodshed by continuing a hopeless struggle, or impose more suffering on the people of Queretero. Anyway, he agreed to the proposal, and that night Lopez got to General Escobedo and proposed that the town be surrendered without opposition, and that the Emperor go free."

"There seems," I said, "to be a good deal of uncertainty about the arrangement between Lopez and Escobedo."

"True, *señor*, for no one else was present at the meeting," de la Rosa answered. "It has been said that Lopez understood that General Escobedo agreed to his plan of surrender and told him the Emperor would have a chance to escape. But a long time afterward General Escobedo wrote an account of the siege of Queretero in which he said he told Lopez plainly that his orders were to accept no arangement except unconditional surrender. The general opinion seems to be that Colonel Lopez was a traitor to his sovereign; even his own wife accused him of it and left him. And there were rumors of gold being used. Anyway, the next night the sentinels left their posts at Lopez's orders, and early in the morning our troops under General Velez and Colonel Rincon-Gillardo entered the town, and the Colonel with a small force proceeded to the convent.

"As Maximilian and his attendants came out the soldiers moved to arrest them, but the colonel told the soldiers that they were citizens and not to molest them. Whether this was a signal for the Emperor to escape—according to the arrangement Lopez claimed to have made—or only a polite gesture on the part of Rincon-Gillardo is uncertain. I think it was the latter, because two members of the Rincon-Gillardo family had been ladies in waiting to the Empress Carlota, and Maximilian and the

colonel knew each other, so it is natural to suppose that a man whose family had been honored at court would not want to make the arrest.

"But it seems that Maximilian would not desert his followers even to save himself, if that were possible. He had heard that Miramon was wounded and went first to see him, then he mounted his horse and rode to the Hill of the Bells where Mejia had gone with a small force. But the town was completely surrounded. Opposite the Hill of the Bells was cavalry under Generals Naranjo and Guardarrama, and my regiment under General Rocha. Seeing that they couldn't break through, Maximilian dismounted. I could see him plainly. He stood there, tall and dignified, and waited calmly till General Echegaray with a small detachment mounted the hill and informed him that he was a prisoner. They rode back to town where the Emperor surrendered his sword to General Escobedo, and then Echegaray led the prisoners back to the convent. Some days later Maximilian, Miramon, and Mejia were tried by a military court and sentenced to death."

"Of course you know, Sergeant," I said, "that Maximilian came to Mexico with good intentions."

"Yes, that is true, *señor,*" he replied. "A written invitation signed by 200 Mexicans was sent from here, and the commission that took him the message assured him that they represented a vast majority of the Mexican people who had decided to adopt the monarchical form of government and to offer him the crown. They really represented only a small minority, but Maximilian had no way of knowing that. He was the innocent victim, too trustful, as I said before, of the promises of others who wanted to use him for their own ends. All those years of grief and suffering were caused by the evil schemes of Napoleon III, aided, to be sure, by a small number of Mexicans."

"Then why, in your opinion," I asked, "did Juarez insist on his execution in spite of pleas from many foreign governments, including that of the United States, that he be allowed to return to Europe?"

"I think," he replied, "it was on account of a decree issued by Maximilian some time before his capture."

"I suppose you mean the decree of October 3rd, 1865," I said.

"Yes, that was it," he nodded. "It provided for the *trial and immediate execution of all armed bands of whatsoever nature.* True it was prepared by the French commander, Bazaine, and was so ruthless, so contrary to Maximilian's nature, that at first he refused to sign it. But it had already been signed by the members of his cabinet, and finally he allowed himself to be persuaded; he did sign it. And the French did execute prisoners, among them two popular Mexican generals.

"ABOUT six o'clock on the morning of June 19th," the sergeant continued, "three firing squads were formed, each in charge of a sergeant. The sergeants were Antonio Guerrero, Cleofas Gonzalez, and myself—the three, you remember, who were promoted after the battle of the 5th of May, 1862. All three squads were commanded by Captain Simon Marroquin, a young man of about twenty-two who also belonged to the First Regiment of Nuevo Leon. Preceded by one division of foot soldiers, we marched to the Hill of the Bells and took our stations in the place selected for the execution. But it was seven forty before the condemned men arrived, and the nervous strain caused by the long delay, and the thoughts of what was about to take place, was very depressing. The prisoners came in three coaches, each accompanied by a priest."

"How did Maximilian appear?" I asked.

"He was extremely pale," de la Rosa replied, "but composed, and looked at us impassively. In those tragic moments during the entire time of preparation he never gave way to emotion. The men descended from the coaches, embraced each other for the last time, and walked calmly to the place appointed. The appearance of the priests with their rosaries, lighted candles, and books of the mass in their hands gave us, for the moment, the impression that they were per-

forming a normal ceremony, one of those solemn acts in which they were accustomed to officiate."

"You say there were three firing squads," I said. "That would be one for each of the men to be executed?"

"Yes, Antonio Guerrero's for Miramon, Cleofas Gonzalez's for Mejia, and mine for Emperor Maximilian."

"And what," I asked, "were your own feelings toward Maximilian? Did you feel—" I was about to say "hatred or resentment?" but he anticipated my intention and responded quickly and with apparent sincerity.

"*No senti rencór, señor.* To be sure, we had before us the man who, however unwillingly, had caused great damage to Mexico, contributing to the continuance of a long, cruel war in which the independence of Mexico was so nearly lost—but no, I felt no rancor. On the contrary, I felt much sympathy for the unhappy gentleman who was meeting his fate so bravely. Before the execution, some one—I do not remember now who it was—berated me severely.

"You see, *señor,*" Manuel de la Rosa explained, extending his hands toward me in an appealing gesture, "I was under orders, I had no choice but to obey no matter how hateful the task, so I think no right-minded person should reproach me. Our captain did speak a few words of apology to the Emperor, and he replied kindly that he understood we were only doing our duty. He distributed a few coins among us and then took his place between the two Mexican generals.

"As the fatal moment drew near, Miramon's nerve weakened a little; he was trembling, and Maximilian asked permission to speak with him. The captain nodded assent and Maximilian turned to Miramon and grasped his arms. 'My dear General,' he said, 'why do you tremble? You have faced death many times, and you must meet this final test with the fortitude of a soldier.' Miramon seemed to regain his composure and Maximilian returned to his place."

"Were the men blindfolded?" I asked.

"No, they did not wish it, but they asked that their faces be not disfigured. The Emperor turned and his gaze moved slowly over the assemblage. In his look was an infinite sadness, not entirely for himself, I thought, but for the land and the people he was leaving, that he had thought to make his own land and his own people. Then he spoke. *I forgive all and pray that all may forgive me. May my blood flow for the good of this land. Long live Mexico!* Those were his last words.

"MIRAMON made a longer speech, protesting against the charge that he was a traitor to his country, and asking that this stain be not placed upon his children. Then, pointing to his heart, he said, 'Here.' Mejia did not utter a single word. He took the crucifix from his breast and, holding it in his hand, waited with characteristic Indian stoicism.

"There followed an awful silence which really lasted but a few moments, but to me it seemed an eternity. The voices of the priests, so grave, solemn, and profound, seemed to shrivel my very being. It all seemed like a strange, fantastic dream. Finally the captain raised his sword and the squads automatically stiffened to attention. As the priests neared the end of their prayer, the captain made another signal and the rifles came to our shoulders and pointed at the prisoners. A few seconds more and the prayer ended with the words—*ascend into the heavens.* The captain's sword swept downward and we fired.

"The noise of the discharge seemed to recall me to reality. The men fell heavily without uttering a sound. The captain stepped quickly to the Emperor's side, put his pistol to his right ear, and gave the *tiro de gracia*—the mercy shot.

The old soldier ceased speaking, closed his eyes, and brushed his hand over them as if to erase the scene from memory.

Presently he said, "I would give much, *señor,* to be able to forget this event which I have related to you, but even now, after all these years, the spectacle of those last moments of the Emperor Maximilian disturbs the tranquility of my sleep. *Fue tan fuerte la impresión que senti*—so terrible was the impression I felt."

(Continued from page 6)

PAUL EMILE MILLER'S verse has appeared in innumerable magazines and has been reprinted in various anthologies. He writes from his home in Plattsburg, N. Y. —

> The background for "Tramps No More," comes from 6 years at sea. I was a radio operator for RCA aboard tramps and this poem comes from the heart of one who loves those "palpitating scows" as much as any man ever has. I know the long hours of suspense, the battle with the elements, the roaring forties, the Caribbean hurricanes . . . their memory is a vital thing in my catalog of dreams. Only ill health and physical incapacity keep me from them today. I hope to crystalize more of these memories into print—both verse and prose.

PEIRSON RICKS, whose "Caissons in the Sky" marks his first appearance on our contents page, introduces himself thuswise—

> I was born in North Carolina in 1908. Read everything I could get my hands on till my Junior year in High School, when I suddenly was sick of reading and decided to write instead. Went to the University of North Carolina in 1926. Dropped out in 1928 to write a very bad novel, which no publisher would take. Went to Yale to study Art. Wrote another bad novel with similar unproductive results.
>
> Worked in a cotton mill, writing stories, poems, plays. Worked for advertising agencies in Philadelphia and New York, writing copy. My first published story appeared in *Story Magazine* last July. Though single, I've been three times rejected by the army, I'm sorry to say. And I'm still sick of reading.

WILLIAM Marshall Rush was born in New Haven, West Va., but soon headed west. In the Rocky Mountain states he has been a U. S. Forest Ranger, Forest Supervisor, and a specialist in the Forest Service and in various state Fish and Game Departments. He has done considerable technical writing, such as a 90,000 word study on trout culture for the Idaho Fish & Game Commission, some more popular writing for the outdoor magazines, and two books: Wild Animals of the Rockies (Harpers), and Wild Life of Idaho (Caxton).

WALTER ALDRICH TENNEY, who introduces us to a figure from a vanished page of history in his interview with Sergeant de la Rosa, writes, on joining our circle for the first time—

> I'm afraid my background is rather tame compared to that of some who gather round the Camp-Fire, but here it is—such as it is.
>
> I was born in Washington County, Maine. My father was a ship master, making voyages to every continent on the globe. Sometimes I went along. Don't think I was a Jonah, but one trip we were wrecked. Davy Jones got ship and cargo but we fooled him on the human freight; we all got to land. Also during vacations, after I was pretty well grown, I used to work in the shipyard in our town; and when I was about nineteen I got a teacher's certificate and taught several terms of country school.
>
> Then we moved to Massachusetts, and I went to work in a shoe factory. Later went to Boston to study art and architecture, including sculpture, both in wood and stone. Shortly after graduation was threatened with T. B., partly due to breathing marble dust. Went to Albuquerque, N. M. Regained my health and was appointed Director of Drawing in the public schools and Art Instructor in the State University. Did some architectural work on the side. Went to Fresno, Cal. and then to Oakland to be principal of a large high school. Began writing for publication—fiction, verse, and articles. Resigned principalship, and have spent several years wandering about Mexico, studying Mexican art, archeology, and history, and writing for publication in the U. S. A. Between trips about Mexico I have planned and supervised a few construction jobs. Also translated a medical book for a Mexican doctor who wanted to publish his work in the United States.

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Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

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Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edw., H. S., Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, 43 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J.

U. S. Marine Corps—MAJOR F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Navy—LIEUT. DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure.*

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★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★**New Zealand: Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Ingle Nook," 39 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, Hawaii.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York City.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.* — CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa.*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia.*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

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ICELAND spar—and we don't mean a member of the Coast Guard's women's auxiliary on arctic duty.

Request: 1. To be of optical grade does Iceland spar have to show a double refraction on any side it is turned?

2. How large do the pieces have to be—length, width, thickness?

3. What is it worth a pound?

4. Could you give me the names and addresses of a firm or two that deals in it?

—E. C. Benson
Bishop, Col.

Reply by Victor Shaw: 1—Iceland spar crystallizes as does all calcite in the rhomb form and each crystal is "double-refracting" on one plane of the rhomb. In any case, you needn't bother about this since when used it is cut scientifically with regard to the plane of polarization.

2—Since this spar is all cut chiefly into prisms in making Nicol prisms and other types used in polariscopes and many different optical instruments, it is used in any size available and the larger the better, thus affording better chance for selections for cutting.

3—I have no quotations at hand. You can get this data of the Foote Mineral Co., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

4—The Foote Company above is only one on my list of dealers.

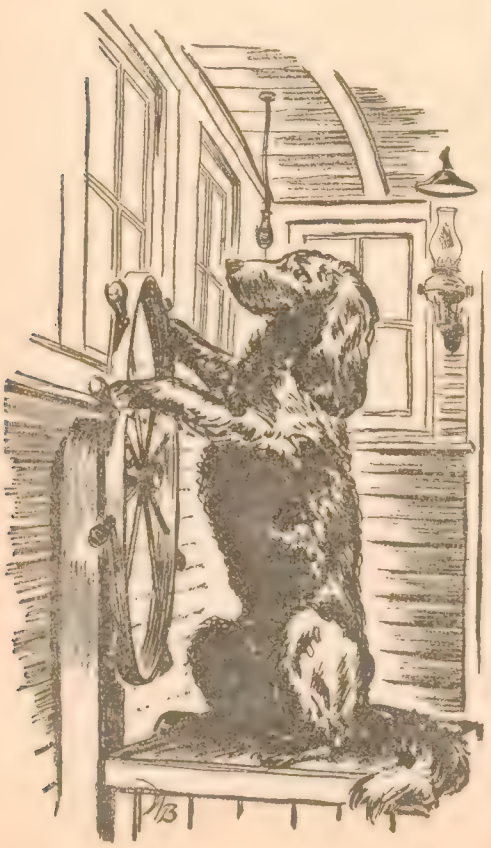
Why don't you take a shot at rock crystals, for optical work—the sort termed "piezoelectric?" Requirements are very rigid, but prices for usable material do run as high as $30 a lb. They use all sizes from ½-inch thick by 2-inch long and over, nothing under. If interested, might write Dr. Graves c|o Radio Corp'n of America, Camden, N. J. Demand for this material is big and growing, as most of what we've been using has come from Brazil—less than 5% from U.S.A.

(Continued from page 73)

Quietly smiling across the table at young Jim, "You have a new job ahead of you," he said. "For the next five or six years you're slated for school, son, that is—if you like the idea. Eight or nine months of school every year—three or four months of play during your vacations and then you're on your own. Engineering or aviation or whatever you want—how does it strike you?"

Jim looked over at George Blake, his eyes wide with his vision of a new world. "Holy old bellerin' bull frogs, Mr. Blake! I'll have to work awful hard, just learnin' how to play! And school—that's the finest thing I could think of!"

He scowled down at the damp and smelly Cap dog. "You better learn how to run a radio before I get back if you want to fly in a B-25 to Tokyo with me and Jimmy Doolittle," he advised. "And don't yawn an' wag that damn tail when a officer talks to you!"



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"LAGOON OF LOST COMMAND"

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When they dragged themselves—bleeding from a hundred coral-cuts—up the beach of that nameless Tuamotou atoll, Steve Burns and Pop Ennis, sole survivors of the *Northern Shore*, never guessed the Axis raider that had sunk their ship would follow them to finish the butchery in the haven of their lagoon refuge. Or that the raider-captain's South Sea bubble would be pricked by moonlight in as strange a reshuffling of command as those bloody seas had ever known.

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NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or for any other reason in the judgment of the editorial staff. No charge is made for publication of notices.

I would like to hear from John Rueben Sharp who was in the Marine Corps at Parris Island, S. C. 1919-1923. He used to live in St. Joseph and Kansas City, Mo. Stf. Sgt. Newton Tushoph, U.S.M.C., Navy 107, Fleet P.O., New York City, N. Y.

I should like to get in touch with Curzon P. Howe who used to live at Saranac Lake, N. Y. He is about 32 and at one time studied dentistry at, I believe, either St. Lawrence or Rensselaer Polytech. Please write P. B. Freer, Box 4, Liberty, Ohio.

Persons named Page from Sagrada, Camden Co., Mo., or relatives of William or Sanford Brown or any Nelsons from Seligman, Barry Co., Mo., are requested to write George E. Page, Gen. Del., Brawley, Calif.

Alvin U. Hodgdon, known as "Tex Ranger" was last heard of in Minnesota headed for either Chicago or New York. Age 44, he travels around playing a guitar and singing. Anyone knowing of his whereabouts please communicate with his brother-in-law, Pfc. Lee Kay, c/o *Adventure*.

Everett Ruess, 27, cowboy artist and writer, formerly of Los Angeles, last seen in St. Petersburg, Fla., May 1935. Anyone having information of whereabouts please communicate with Burton Bowen, VAF 2, Bath, N. Y.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Arthur Leo Messier, last seen about ten years ago in New York City and now believed in the West, please write Charles H. Hoffmann, c/o Veterans Hospital, Tucson, Ariz.

Any information concerning Doug Hayward, age 23, last residing in Chambersburg, Pa., will be most welcome and appreciated by Pvt. Peter Dunsky, c/o *Adventure*.

(Continued from page 125)

OLD BALDHEAD robbed as persistently as ever. When Pandion eluded him he found other victims. Once he robbed a pheasant's nest and ate all the little ones. Another time he soared away with a newly born lamb in his talons.

On a dark, cloudy day in September, Pandion was winging homeward with a carp much smaller than his usual catch, about a one-pounder. Baldhead saw him and dived like a streak of black lightning, his powerful stubby wings geared to their highest speed, straight at the osprey's back.

Pandion banked sharply and the eagle shot past. This fish was so light Pandion found it no trick at all to outmaneuver the heavy Baldhead. Once, twice, three times the eagle dived like an arrow tipped with silver, missed, flattened out, circled and climbed, only to dive again and miss. The eagle began to tire, and began to lose his cool, calculating, deadly aim.

In desperation he circled high above the osprey and came down in a terrific dive. Pandion dived, too, just a few feet ahead of the eagle. Their speed was bullet-like as they streaked downward, a hundred feet, two hundred. Pandion was spiraling, as he did when about to strike the water for a fish, but there was no water below, only trees, rocks and the unyielding earth. The bald eagle dived in a straight line.

Down and ever down they sped until Pandion seemed about to crash into the rocks in his desperation. A scant fifty feet from the ground he leveled out and angled upward. Baldhead shot past in his straight dive, flattened out a fraction of a second too late and with powerful wings beating the air in a frantic attempt to save himself, crashed into the top of a pine tree and hung helpless in its branches.

Winter snows deepened in the canyon. Icy winds buffeted the aerie. Parts of it fell away, but with spring Pandion came back to repair it, to gather heavy sticks, light twigs, leaves of aspen and mountain maple. Under the pine tree he found feathers, to make cozy and warm the ancient nest on the pinnacle.

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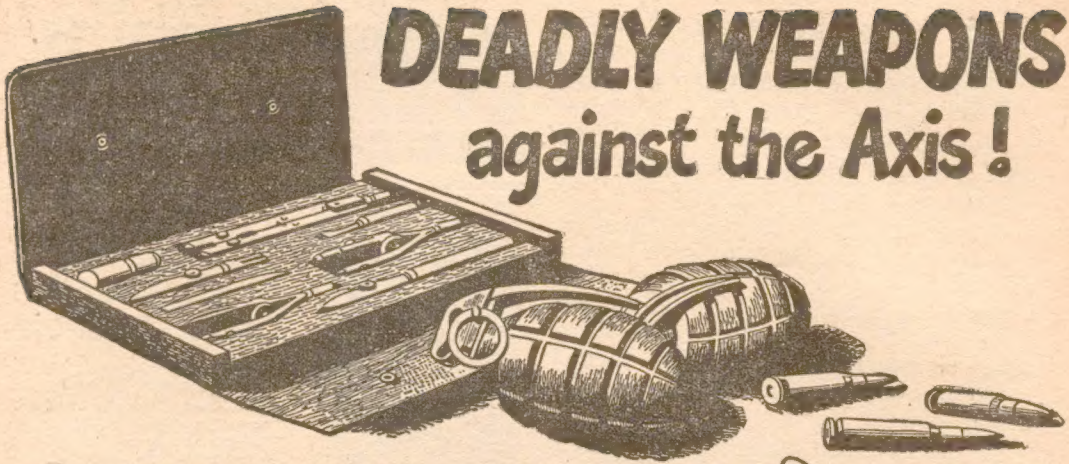

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☐ Radio Servicing
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☐ R. R. Signalman ☐ Refrigeration
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☐ Ship Drafting
☐ Shipfitting ☐ Shop Practice
☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines
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☐ Textile Designing
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☐ Welding, Gas and Electric
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☐ Business Management
☐ Cartooning ☐ Civil Service
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☐ Cost Accounting
☐ C. P. Accounting
☐ First Year College
☐ Foremanship ☐ French
☐ Good English
☐ High School
☐ Managing Men at Work
☐ Railway Postal Clerk
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Secretarial ☐ Spanish
☐ Showcard and Sign Lettering
☐ Traffic Management

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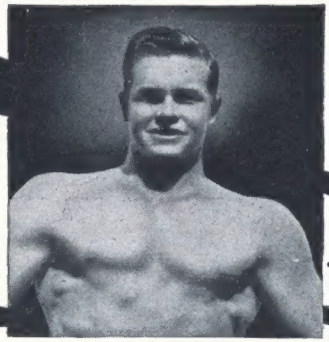

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I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

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